The Abhidharmasamuccaya

Venerable Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche

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Teachings by the Venerable Traleg Kyabgon, Rinpoche

The Abhidharmasamuccaya is an edited transcript of a series of talks given by the Venerable Traleg Kyabgon, Rinpoche at KEBI from July to October, 1983.

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The Venerable Traleg Kyabgon, Rinpoche was born in 1955 in Eastern Tibet. At the age of two, he was recognised by His Holiness the sixteenth Gyalwa Karmapa, head of the Kagyu lineage, as the ninth incarnation of the Traleg tulkus, which can be traced back to the time of Saltong Shogam, a contemporary of the first Karmapa. Traleg Rinpoche was enthroned as the Abbot of Tra'gu Monastery in Tibet and following the Chinese invasion of his country was taken to safety in India. There he continued the rigorous training prescribed for tulkus born with responsibilities as major lineage holders in the Tibetan tradition of Vajrayana Buddhism. This training included five years at Sanskrit University in Varanasi and several years at Rumtek Monastery, the main seat of the Karma Kagyu Lineage. Not only has Traleg Rinpoche received the complete teachings of the Karma Kagyu tradition of Vajrayana Buddhism, but he is also well acquainted with the practices and philosophy of the Drugpa Kagyu strand of the Kagyu lineage, having spent nine years studying with the Regent of the Drugpa Kagyu, the late Dungse Rinpoche, at his monastery in Darjeeling.

Rinpoche came to Australia in 1980 in order to make the teachings and practices of the Kagyu tradition available here. He established the Kagyu E-Vam Buddhist Institute in 1982 and regularly conducts courses and retreats in the practice and theory of Buddhism for the Institute. Rinpoche has travelled widely, giving lectures and seminars on Buddhism and related topics in the United States, Canada, New Zealand, South-East Asia and Europe.



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The Three Levels of Consciousness

We will be exploring the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, a text that belongs to the later development of Buddhism. Early Buddhism is known as Theravadin or Hinayana Buddhism. Later Buddhism is known as Mahayana Buddhism. It has two schools: Madhyamika, the school of the middle way, and Yogacara, the practitioners of yoga.

Yoga, in this case, has very little to do with physical dexterity, with how you can twist your arms or fiddle your toes. It is very much related with learning how to meditate properly and relate to one's own mind, with trying to understand the sort of mental states we go through in meditation and so on. The *Abhidharmasamuccaya* presents that kind of overall structure, in the fullest sense.

The founder of Yogacara, the school of practice, was Asanga. As has happened so many times, it's very hard to be able to really grasp or understand what he was like as a person or what sort of things really took place, because he lived, roughly, in the fifth century, and historical facts seems to be somewhat secondary in this case. So many myths and legends revolve around a person when that person lived in such a remote age. Once we dispense with that, we get to *Abhidharmasamuccaya*.

Asanga composed a lot of texts and among them the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* has a very prominent position. It is one of his most essential texts and it's also one of the most psychologically oriented. It provides a framework, as well as a general pattern, as to how a practitioner is to follow the path, develop oneself and finally attain Buddhahood.

Rather than go into great detail about the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, which might confuse, rather than enlighten you, we are just going to concern ourselves with basic concepts. We can just get the gist of Yogacara psychology or philosophy.

Yogacara philosophy, as I've already mentioned, is not so much concerned with intellectual activities as with practice. At the same time, it gives some psychological explanations about how we function, how we exist, how we relate to the world and so on.

Two of the most important notions related to the practice of Yogacara are known as *atma* and *dharma*.

In this case, atma is not the Hindu notion of soul and dharma does not mean the Buddhist scriptures or Buddhism.

In a Buddhist context, dharma normally means *the law*: Buddhism. In a Hindu context, dharma means the right way of living, right conduct, something of that nature. How to treat your wife or your husband properly is dharma.

But here, dharma is related to the experienced. Whatever we experience is known as dharma. It could be an external object or it could be our own mental state. We experience pain, toothache, stomach ache. That is part of dharma.

Anything that has to do with the subjective aspect of our life or experience is atma.

We could say that dharma is objectivity and atma is subjectivity.

So, we have these two situations. Yogacara philosophy makes a bold statement, which is that both subjectivity and objectivity are transformations of the consciousness. What we experience, as well as the experiences themselves, are

transformations of our own consciousness and there is nothing beyond that. There is no extra experiential thing that we could relate to.

We can look at how this is possible, at how Yogacara tries to explain this, at what sort of justification Yogacara philosophy tries to offer.

According to Yogacara, consciousness has three levels.

The first level is known as *the substratum of awareness*. It's called *alayavijnana* in Sanskrit. *Alaya* means *basic, basis, substratum*. *Vijnana* means *awareness* or *consciousness*. So, substratum of awareness.

Sometimes people translate it as *storehouse consciousness*. Professor Jeffrey Hopkins translates it as *the basis of all*. I'm not trying to be pedantic here. If you want to relate to it as being the substratum of awareness or the basis of all or storehouse consciousness, that's fine. There's no problem there.

Basically, what this means is that all our conscious processes depend upon the storehouse consciousness. Everything comes from it and also dissolves somewhat back into it. We could almost say that it is a kind of unconscious, rather than conscious, state of mind, but if we say it's unconscious that is debatable in many ways.

Even Western psychologists debate about this. When Freud says there is some kind of unconscious state, others say that all unconscious processes which take place are really our own decision. We don't like certain things, so we make the choice not to be aware of those things. That is a conscious act, in some sense. I think we could say the same thing here.

There is a reason why Yogacara philosophy introduced the notion of the substratum of awareness.

The Buddhist tradition is normally known as *atmavadin*, which means no-self school, no-self tradition. Most Buddhist schools had completely dispensed with the notion of soul or self, but the Yogacarins, the people who expounded Yogacara philosophy, thought that this really wasn't in keeping with our own experience of ourselves. We could say that we are made up of nothing but our own bodily constituents and thought process perceptions jumbled together and there's no self or soul to unify the whole thing, but Yogacara philosophy thought that this cannot really explain the problem of personal identity.

If you woke up in the morning and had cornflakes for breakfast, then when you go to bed, you think you are the same person who had cornflakes in the morning. You don't think the person who had the cornflakes is someone different from the one who's going to bed tonight.

We have thought processes taking place in a temporal way. Thoughts come and go, perceptions come and go, but there's some kind of unifying process whereby we are aware that we are the same person, through and through. So, the Yogacarins said there is a basic state of consciousness, which actually continues.

There is also a problem, if we want to look at it that way, when we die. If we believe in reincarnation, there must be some kind of basic principle that goes through and gets reborn. Yogacarins said that we can't take rebirth, unless there is some kind of basic principle - the alayavijnana, the substratum of awareness - that is responsible for rebirth.

Yogacarins say we have to believe in some kind of substratum of consciousness or awareness to be able to really explain the rebirth processes, our memory, personal identity and so on.

The Yogacarins' postulation of a substratum of awareness is not just done arbitrarily. They also try to give a description of the evolution of consciousness. They feel that our whole conscious process is evolutionary. We begin from some kind of primitive and unsophisticated level, then we develop and get into more sophisticated states of mind.

So, there is the basic substratum of awareness. Then, further growth takes place, which is known as *manovijnana.*

I think we could translate that as *egocentric mentation. Egocentric* we all know. *Mentation* comes from Latin, I think, and means *act of the mind.* So, egocentric mentation means egocentric acts of the mind.

Further growth takes place on this second level of consciousness. The alayavijnana begins to split into two regions. There is the reflecting side of the consciousness, the manovijnana, and then there's the region that the conscious side is reflecting upon. So, two sides of consciousness begin to develop on this level. Most of our egocentric activities revolve around this egocentric mentation, the second level of the development of consciousness.

There are three specific notions which are related to this particular mental state.

Belief in self, thinking that we have a soul or a self, gets generated on this level. Normally, the second level of consciousness mistakenly thinks that the substratum of awareness is our own self or soul.

The second belief is known as arrogance and self. All our pride, thinking how fantastic or how terrific we are, is also related to this second level of consciousness. This includes thinking how terrible we are, how bad we are. Unless we are egocentric, we are not going to feel bad and terrible about ourselves and disparage ourselves, so that is also arrogance.

The last notion is known as obsessive concern with oneself. This is really related to most of our activities. We can't look at anything without using ourselves as a reference point. Whatever we engage in, we always refer back to ourselves.

Then, a third and final level of development begins to take place when we develop the six sense organs. We have five sensory organs, which everyone in the Western tradition is familiar with. In a Buddhist context, the sixth is the intellectual organ or, as we normally call it, the empirical mind. The six sense fields begin to develop from here, as well. This is the last stage of the full development and is known as *pravrtti-vijnana,* which could be translated as *empirical consciousness.*

When this whole process has taken place, then consciousness is fully developed and all kinds of neuroses and emotional instabilities begin to develop, because of dualistic fixation. We believe that there is an object *out there* and a subject *in here.* Because of that, we begin to respond in ways which create all kinds of neurotic tendencies or traces and dispositions, which are called *vasanas.*

Most of our interactions with the world really depend upon the interaction between the third level of consciousness, which consists of the six sense organs and the six sense fields, and the substratum of awareness, which is a kind of unconscious level.

Whatever information the third stage of consciousness receives, gets filtered through the second level of egocentric mentation. Egocentric mentation is where everything gets edited and put into proper perspective. Then, that information is fed into the unconscious memory bank, the substratum of awareness.

Our senses might get stimulated by a particular sensory object or *alambana*. That information is carried to the second level of consciousness. Egocentric mentation performs some editing and then that information is fed into the substratum of awareness. This leaves traces and dispositions on the substratum of awareness, which force us to act in a particular way. The whole thing begins to become a habitual process. We act in a particular way and that again leaves traces and dispositions which make us act in a particular way. We continue that indefinitely, which is known as *samsara* or *going in cycles*.

This is the stage of bondage, in some sense. In Christian terminology, it might be called the condemned state. We are totally bewildered.

Even though the substratum of awareness is perceived as a kind of persisting principle, it is not eternal. It's not like a soul that exists eternally. The substratum of awareness also goes through changes. It goes through temporal processes itself. It is said that, when we attain enlightenment, this substratum of awareness comes to an end. Once the content of the substratum of awareness is exhausted, we begin to develop a new kind of substratum of awareness. It continues that way, rather than as the same old kind of substratum of awareness persisting indefinitely.

The second level of consciousness doesn't operate when we are unconscious or when we are sleeping. We have to perform a deliberate act for there to be egocentric mentation. When we attain enlightenment, this level of consciousness begins to disappear.

As long as there is interaction between these three levels of consciousness and also some kind of fixation on subjectivity and objectivity, then there's a continuous process taking place. We do one thing and that leads to another, and that leads to another. A continuous, indefinite process takes place, which is known as samsara. This process can be stopped, through employing a certain kind of method, which we'll discuss in the following talks.

If you want to ask questions, you are welcome.

Q: Was *atman* one of the two notions that the Yogacarins had?
A: Atma. In a Hindu context, atma normally means self or soul, something like that. Here, atma is related to any kind of subjective experience. We don't have to infer about our own subjective experiences, we directly experience them. Anything that we have to infer, that we have to use inference for, is the objective side, which is dharma.

Q: So the objective side is what actually happens?
A: What is experienced. We might have to use inference or we might not. It depends on whether it's taking place in our own mind. If we experience a table, then that is outside our experience, in some sense. We directly experience a toothache or a headache, but it is experienced, so there is some kind of objective side. It could be physical or mental, depending on the situation.

Q: I missed the point of why of you referred to atma and dharma.
A: The whole process of the three levels of consciousness is related to atma and dharma, subject and object. The interaction between the three levels of consciousness is related to subject and object, through and through.

Q: The person and their world.
A: That's right. The person and their world. At the same time, on the objective level it includes a person's thought process as well. Thought and what thought is about. Aggression and what a person is aggressive about. Aggression on the subjective side, what one is aggressive about on the objective side. The person and their view of the world. The world is on the objective side, the person is on the subjective side. That's atma and dharma. The whole thing is explained as a transformation of a conscious process.

Q: Atma and dharma come from the alayavijnana, so both are forms of consciousness. They're basically the same thing.
A: That's right. We have to keep in mind that we're not talking about chairs and tables as they are. We're talking about how we experience chairs and tables. Sometimes people have interpreted Yogacara as saying that a chair is in your mind, a table is in your mind, everything is in your mind. Yogacara is really talking about how we experience these things. We're not talking about how they exist in themselves.

Q: But there is the Yogacarin statement of cittamatra, that there is *mind only*.
A: Yogacarins put so much emphasis on the mind because they are concerned with practice. Some people have thought they were saying that everything is in your mind. Some of these people were influenced by certain Western philosophies. When Berkeley said "Whatever you see or hear is in your own mind, it's all ideas", they thought "This really makes sense." I think there's a problem there.

Q: When you're talking about everything coming from the mind, what you're talking about is our reactions and perceptions of things?
A: That's right. We are not concerned about whether or not a chair exists. That's secondary. Why spend so much time arguing about whether or not a chair exists, instead of learning how we experience and relate to the chair, and what sort of experience we've got?

Q: Egocentric mentation arises out of the substratum, so there's a split. You were talking about reflecting on something?
A: What is reflected upon is the substratum of awareness. It splits into two regions. One section of the substratum of awareness is reflected by the other. There's the reflected side and the side that performs the act of reflection. Consciousness begins to develop into these two regions. We might experience pain. The pain, which is the objective side, is experienced by the subjective side. So it begins to develop into two kinds of regions, which is a split of some kind on the basic, fundamental level.

Q: At the time of enlightenment, all the substratum becomes conscious?
A: That's right

Q: Does a new substratum start after that? They say samsara is endless. Is that what it means?
A: It's not endless, as much as indefinite. Endless means it's going to continue forever. Indefinite means it could stop any minute.

Q: If enlightened beings exhaust their subconscious, what is their function of memory for?
A: When there's a substratum of awareness, an unconscious state of mind, there's a dark corner that we don't know about. We cannot be aware of this aspect at all. In many ways, it's totally ambiguous.

An enlightened person becomes aware of this, so the unconscious aspect begins to become exhausted of its contents. That doesn't make you an amnesiac who can't remember anything. Because you are aware, totally aware, there's no problem at all.

In a way, it's an evolutionary process. It starts from an indefinite state of mind: the substratum of awareness. That's not so much an enlightened state, as a state of unawareness. A split takes place and you come into samsaric existence. Then you go through a whole process and the more you become aware of yourself, the more you are able to approach the goal, or whatever you want to call it. The process takes place that way. Any evolutionary process has a goal. A simple organism develops into a more complicated organism. A physicist might study atoms and finds that it's much more complicated than that. There's always some evolutionary process taking place on some level.

Q: So the substratum of awareness is a term which only applies to confused or unenlightened people?
A: In a way. It's our own inner act. That's what I meant when I said it's a conscious decision, in some sense, not to be aware of ourselves. We ignore certain aspects of our own consciousness and that's a conscious decision, on some level. It's not unconscious in the ultimate sense. Resolution of that means becoming aware. That's what meditation is supposed to be: learning how to explore the dark corners of our consciousness . Not run away from them or try to ignore them, but just explore our consciousness as much as we can.

Q: You said something about emotional instability developing because of dualistic fixation.
A: Dualistic fixation is related to the second level of consciousness, because that's where all the egocentric activities are involved. There is a sharp distinction between *you* and *other*.

Q: Are we born with the substratum?

A: It's due to the substratum of awareness that we are born. That is really what compels us to take rebirth. And it persists after death.

Q: Before the substratum comes into being, what is there?
A: Buddhists would say that question is, in some ways, a self-defeating exercise. We could argue about whether the chicken or the egg came first. We can theorise about whether I came first or the substratum of awareness came first, but that doesn't really help us.

That's why Buddhists say it's beginningless. It doesn't really mean that it's beginningless, it just means indefinite. We could attain Buddhahood, if we choose to. We can work on ourselves and attain Buddhahood and a fully enlightened state. It's not predetermined that we must continue to take rebirth forever. We start off with the substratum of awareness and go from there. A Buddhist would say that the substratum of awareness exists due to our own ignorance or lack of awareness.

Q: What is it that is aware of the substratum?
A: It's the conscious side of it. We try to develop the third level of consciousness as much as we can. We begin to explore our consciousness, both the conscious and unconscious sections. We have to learn how to be completely aware of these things. It's a matter of developing the section or the region that we are aware of in normal circumstances. We could expand that as we go along.

Q: I thought that some type of egocentric mentation would not be dissolved after death.
A: After death? No. When you're unconscious or when you're sleeping, then egocentric mentation doesn't operate. That doesn't mean it has ceased to function completely, it just means that it has ceased to function temporarily. It is dormant. In order for there to be egocentric mentation, there has to be some kind of deliberate act involved.

Q: Are the images that come up in dreams symbolic of our egocentric action?
A: In some ways, yes. But the thing is, that's precisely the point. You can't choose to have a dream. You can't say, "I've had a hard day, I'm going to have a bloody good dream tonight." You can't do that. Whatever takes place when you're asleep is really related to the unconscious side of your consciousness, rather than your conscious side.

Q: We're never going to actually perceive anything as it is, are we? We're always operating from the preconceptions of what come out of the storehouse consciousness, so we just keep going and going and going and think "This is real".
A: That's right. Which is our own confusion, in some sense.

Q: How can you work through this process, when you're at the endpoint of delusion? You've gone through the whole process wrongly.
A: Not necessarily. In meditation, for instance, what you do is see how your sense organs are stimulated by certain things. On the intellectual level, there might be a

certain thought process or emotional state that disturbs you. You begin to learn how that actually disturbs you, how that actually stimulates your responses. Then you see how the whole thing gets filtered through your egocentric mentation. It's not hard. We just look at it and see how we add certain things. Projection is part of editing, in many ways. We look at a certain situation and don't see it as it is, we see it as we want to see it. We project onto it certain things which are not there. That comes from the editing process that takes place within our mind. We begin to inquire further and further into the whole process.

Q: You were describing the whole process as samsaric. Is the substratum the source of nirvana as well?
A: Yes. It gets transmuted. We begin to discover that the substratum of awareness is not our self. As we said, the second level of consciousness mistakenly holds the substratum of awareness to be the soul. "This is me. This is my soul." But once we begin to dispense with that notion, then we gradually discover that it's not our soul. In fact, it contains a tremendous intelligence. It's a self-awakened state, in some sense. And we also begin to discover that there aren't really three levels of consciousness. But I think that if we discuss this now, we'll only get confused.

Q: I can't see the difference between the Buddhist notion of alayavijnana and the Hindu soul concept. The only distinction is that the alayavijnana changes all the time.
A: The difference is that the substratum of awareness cannot exist without its content. You have traces and dispositions stored up. Once they get exhausted, another alayavijnana develops, rather than the same old thing persisting throughout.

In some sense, the alayavijnana has a larger scale of persistency than the other levels of consciousness. But still, the alayavijnana itself is temporal. It is temporal, despite its persistence. Every minute, our cells are dying and getting replaced, but then there's *you. You* live on until *you* die, but your cells are dying and getting replaced every minute. It's a similar thing. We have thought processes, images and so on that are related to all kinds of conscious processes, but then there's the substratum of awareness which persists for a period of time.

Q: Are you saying the alayavijnana is not a thing, it's just a process?
A: It's a substratum where the whole thing is stored. But it can only exist if there are contents for it. It can't exist without the contents.

Q: Where did the contents come from?
A: The contents come from the interaction between the alayavijnana and the empirical consciousness, the substratum of awareness and the interactions between the three levels of consciousness. You leave certain traces and dispositions which compel you to act in a particular way, in an emotive way, and that leaves traces and dispositions, and then, again, you act that way. So the process continues that way. It becomes a habitual process, which is known as vasana. In Tibetan it's called *bag-chags*.

Q: If you develop to the stage of a Buddha, what is the Buddha aware of?
A: The Buddha is not obsessively concerned with his own self. That's the difference. If you get knocked out, you think "Someone knocked *me* out." This is *me*. What is it? That very act itself would be egocentric mentation and believing that you are the same person would be believing in the existence of the substratum of awareness. Buddha might not have those kind of concerns. You might think, "That bloody guy, he did this to me. I'm going to get back at him." All kinds of neurotic thought processes begin take place on that level.

Q: How does the notion of alayavijnana relate to the notion of dharmakaya?
A: The purified state of alayavijnana would be dharmakaya.

Q: If someone has a feeling that they're not very wholesome, isn't that motivation to improve themselves?
A: That's right. That's why it's part of the arrogance of self. There are three aspects of egocentric mentation. The arrogance of self is the second one, which is either feeling good about yourself or feeling terrible about yourself and wanting to improve yourself.

Q: So a sense of wanting to improve oneself is not particularly wholesome?
A: It is wholesome. What is meant here is that, normally, we begin to become neurotic. If you really detest yourself or become suicidal, then that's neurotic. It's not healthy at all. But if you want to develop yourself in a healthy way, there's no problem there. It's not so much wanting to develop, but hating yourself, thinking that the whole thing has come to an end and that there's no point in continuing.

Q: And that's not any different from pride?
A: It is pride. It is an expression of pride. That's how a Buddhist would see it. It's still concerned with *you*. *Your* pride is crushed. It's all concerned with *your* own well-being, in a negative way.

If it's done in a positive way, then that's no problem. Even wanting to attain Buddhahood is part of a self-growth process. Wanting to improve oneself is okay, as long as it doesn't become a neurotic preoccupation. But if you become preoccupied with the whole thing, then it becomes a self-defeating process. That would be part of egocentric mentation.

Q: It's like having a boat on a river using the wind. After a while, you realise you could use this strong undercurrent which has a self-sustaining energy.
A: In some sense, yes. Discovering what is already there, rather than trying to manufacture something, which we normally tend to do. If we try to improve ourselves in a neurotic way, we're trying to manufacture, rather than discover. We're not making any discoveries. We're producing unnecessary excess luggage.

Q: How can we know the contents of the substratum, since that knowledge has been filtered by consciousness?

A: The best way to find out is through doing meditation. At the same time, we have to pay attention to how we relate to things in an ordinary sense. We don't necessarily have to sit in meditative posture, but whenever we have time we could see how we relate to things, how all these different levels of mind operate. By doing that, we could see the whole operation.

Q: What about the reliability of what I come to understand from observation? That's being filtered through my consciousness.
A: I think the reliability would depend on your own biases. The less biased you are about the whole thing, then the more reliable it would be. Seriously. Sometimes we feel we're really getting something out of it and then we become totally excited or neurotic and lose whatever we gained, in some sense. If we are less biased and less emotionally involved with the whole situation, then we're going to see it from a much better perspective, in some sense.

Q: There seems to be a dilemma in recognising the nature of the substratum, because that is another interpretation.
A: No, I think that whatever we experience really comes from that, in some sense. Whatever we do leaves traces and dispositions there. For instance, if you just sit down and, for no reason, suddenly remember that when you were six you were reading Robinson Crusoe, that would be part of the traces and dispositions, part of the substratum of awareness operating on that level. There was no external situation or stimulus to provoke that response. You just happen to suddenly discover or realise that you are thinking about it. You could remember something that took place three months ago. For no reason, you just happen to contemplate it. If we experience these things, we need to explore further.

Q: I'd always thought that spontaneous insight was actually reprocessed or edited in order to make sense of it. You're talking about it a bit differently.
A: I think so. If we thought, "That's nothing, I just happened to stumble on it," then we wouldn't know anything. There might be some kind of interpretation involved, but still, we're learning. We're learning why certain things are happening. Which is important.

Q: How do the three levels of consciousness relate to the superego, ego and id?
A: I don't know very much about psychoanalysis, but I would imagine that those three would be related with egocentric mentation, the second level of consciousness. But there's no conflict between the Buddhist three aspects of egocentric mentation. In Freudian psychology, id, ego and superego are always fighting among themselves. The id is saying "I want to do this" and the superego is saying "Cool down, take it easy." All kinds of processes of that nature are taking place.

Q: Do you think that there's more internal conflict in the Western way of life than in the Eastern way of life?

A: I don't think that's necessarily so. I think this is universal. I think this takes place in any culture. There are always two sides to human beings: a primitive side which is instinctive and a developed side which is more rational. Whenever instinct tells you something, you can look at it and say "Cool down." You can do that. I think it's as simple as that.

Q: You seem to be saying "Trust in your own experience", yet that experience is coming from a deluded state. How can you trust judging whether you're progressing or judging how the mind works, if you're suspicious about the whole mechanism to start with?
A: You have to be critical and, at the same time, you have to trust your own judgement. These two things go together. I don't think they're contradictory. You make a judgement and then you critically judge it. You critically judge your own judgement. In some sense, that has to be the process. Otherwise, you would end up a sceptic. You would become suspicious of everything.

Desecrates doubted everything that was external to him. He doubted anything that wasn't in his consciousness. He couldn't believe in anything. Hume, the great Anglo-Saxon philosopher, doubted even himself.

If you really doubt everything, you end up not being able to make any kind of judgement whatsoever. If you don't doubt anything, then you become a dogmatic. Buddhists say you have to have a middle way, with whatever you do.

Q: So if you have a reasonable doubt, you'd still work with it?
A: That's right. You can doubt everything. You could say "How do I know that I'm seeing a table?" "How do I know that I'm experiencing aggression? There's nothing there. It's just a flash of something, it comes and goes. There's nothing there." You could go on and on indefinitely. There has to be some kind of middle approach.

Q: Are you saying that the idea of doubt comes about because there's an object and a subject?
A: Yes. That's right.

Q: I was thinking of the unconscious as an object, as something that my conscious observed. If I don't think of it like that, if it's just there, then that dilemma's gone.
A: That's precisely it.

We can't become dogmatic and say there is an object in our mental process or in the physical situation, say there is something out there and believe in it and become dogmatic about the whole thing. And we cannot doubt the whole thing and end up being a sceptic. We need to question, but not end up a sceptic, Either way, we don't learn anything. If we become dogmatic, we don't learn anything; if we become a sceptic, we don't learn anything either. We end up being a sceptic because we doubt everything. If we doubt, that means we haven't any knowledge.

Q: You could get very attached to the unconscious, as you might to an object.

A: That's right. And that would produce more traces and dispositions, so the process would continue indefinitely.

Q: Does the alayavijnana exist within the mind or does it exist related to the phenomenal world?
A: The substratum of awareness is linked with both: with yourself and with your experience of the world. Not so much the world as it is, but how you experience the world.

Q: Is the alayavijnana related to the sense of self or ego? Without that sense of self, there's no alayavijnana?
A: Let's say that the substratum of awareness does not depend upon the other consciousnesses. The other conscious processes depend upon the substratum of awareness.

Q: There seem to be blind spots related to the substratum of awareness. Those blind spots need to be investigated.
A: That's right. And there might be some kind of resistance on your part, due to egocentric mentation. You might not want to explore certain things. You might choose not to.

Q: So there's a relationship between the *I* and those blind spots?
A: Definitely.

Q: How is that resistance made less resistant?
A: Through meditation, obviously. And through properly observing ourselves. That's what this whole thing is all about. Normally, we don't really want to observe anything about ourselves. If there's nothing to do, we want to go out or we choose to do something or other, rather than look at what is really taking place.

Q: If you start to experience some blind spot when you're walking down the street, will that blind spot reoccur during your practice sessions or does it occur only when you're going through some activity?
A: It's taking place most of the time. You need to sit down whenever you can and just observe. It's as simple as that. You don't need to feel left out by the fact that you're walking down the street.

The Three Constitutive Principles

I would like to introduce a few concepts to enhance our understanding of lectures that are going to follow. This subject matter is not discussed in any great detail in the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, but the text makes references to it. So, if we have a general idea about these concepts, it's going to be easier for us to understand what's going to follow.

We have introduced the notion of the evolution of consciousness, the development of consciousness, and talked about the three levels of the transformation of consciousness. What we are going to say is also, in a way, tied up with that.

The three concepts that we have to get familiarised with are known as the three constitutive principles. The first is *parinispanna svabhava,* which can be translated as *the ideally absolute.* The second is known as *paratantra svabhava.* That can be translated as *the relative.* The last is known as *parikalpita svabhava.* That can be translated as *the notional-conceptual.*

Here, we are, in some sense, concerned with metaphysics. We will not go into great detail, as far as this side of the whole thing is concerned, but now and then we will be making references to these concepts, so we should try to get familiarised with them.

The ideally absolute is that state of ourselves when there is no longer any distinction between subject and object, when there is no distinction between our experience and what is experienced. There is an indeterminate state, which is free from the duality of subject and object.

The relative begins to operate when we become self-conscious and duality begins to take place. When we go beyond the substratum of awareness and enter into the rest of the transformation of consciousness, then the relative has begun and is taking place.

The notional-conceptual is related to belief in subject and object. Subject and object are constructed on the relative. The relative does not really contain any subject and object, but subject and object are constructed upon it, due to the notional-conceptual.

We could say that the ideally absolute is the state of nirvana and the relative and notional-conceptual are the samsaric mentality, which we experience continuously.

The relative itself is the ideally absolute, but due to the notional-conceptual, due to our habitual patterns, it is mismanaged. We are unable to perceive the ideally absolute. It is seen in the form of subject and object, which is the relative. When subject and object are removed, then the relative reveals itself as the ideally absolute.

As we can see, of the three constitutive principles the most important is the relative. It is responsible for the transformation of consciousness. All the levels of transformation of consciousness that we have discussed come under the heading of the relative. The relative becomes the basis of both samsara and nirvana. We either attain enlightenment or we go astray and get involved in the notional-conceptual.

Traditionally, these three principles are conveyed by the simile of a magician's creation of an elephant. A magician utters an incantation onto a piece of wood.

Spectators who are under the influence of the incantation perceive the wood as an elephant.

The perception of the elephant is the notional-conceptual.

The way the elephant appears depends upon the incantation, the wood, the magician and so on. That is the relative.

When the influence of the incantation begins to wear off, then one begins sees the wood as it is. That is the ideally absolute. The ideally absolute is something which is left behind when all those things are exhausted.

In a similar way, the substratum of awareness and the traces and dispositions stored up within us make us see or perceive everything in terms of subject and object, but subject and object do not exist. They are constructed upon the relative. We do not realise that the relative itself is the ideally absolute. Once the relative is purified of the dualistic notion of subject and object, then it reveals itself as the ideally absolute.

Everything that we experience is put under the headings of subject and object. The whole purpose of practice, if you like, is to remove that. The ideally absolute is revealed and discovered as being neither subjective nor objective. In other words, the ideally absolute is not one particular individual's state of mind, nor is it an objective thing to be discovered. It is revealed as a state of mind where there is no distinction between the object which has to be apprehended and the subject who apprehends the object.

I think we could leave it there.

This is the most metaphysical aspect of the whole thing. If we get familiar with these concepts, I think it will make it easier to be able to understand the coming lectures.

If you have any questions, you're welcome.

Q: What are the Tibetan terms for these three principles?

A: The notional-conceptional is called *kun brtags pa*, the relative is called *gzan gyi dban* and the ideally absolute is called *yons su grub pa.*

Q: How do those differ from *kun-rdzob* (relatively real) and *don dam* (ultimately real)?

A: The first two are kun-rdzob, the third one is don dam.

Madhyamika philosophy talks about absolute and relative truth. The relative and the notional-conceptual would be relative truth. The ideally absolute would be absolute truth.

Q: Does the use of different language imply different connotations in Madhyamika and Yogacara?

A: Yes. In Yogacara philosophy, the notional-conceptual is not just emptiness - as the Madhyamikans say - and the ideally absolute is something that can be discovered and realised. In some ways, it's an experiential state. But, at the same time, there is something to be discovered.

Yogacarins say that what the ideally absolute is empty of is subject and object. The ideally absolute itself is not empty. In Madhyamika philosophy, the absolute itself is empty.

In Yogacara philosophy, the ideally absolute is empty of the notional conceptual, which is constructed on the relative. Once that is removed, then the ideally absolute is discovered. So, the ideally absolute is revealed as a consciousness, as well as *tathata* or things as they are.

When the substratum of awareness is purified, it no longer remains the basis whereby all the traces and dispositions are stored up. It gets purified of all that, so it can apprehend or perceive things in their true nature, properly. At the same time, what is perceived - the real nature of things - and the purified form of the substratum of awareness are not seen as two different things, like in ordinary experience. What is perceived and that which is doing the perceiving are not differentiated.

Q: Is the experience of the ideally absolute the same as nondual awareness?
A: It is nondual awareness. You don't construct anything and you don't see everything in subject and object terms, so you see things in a different light. You no longer project your own dispositions and tendencies onto things. You see things as they are, which means that you no longer see things as being something out there to be experienced or perceived and you here.

Q: Does the basic teaching arise from the *Surangama Sutra*?
A: Yes, and the *Lankavatara Sutra*. The *Surangama Sutra* and the *Lankavatara Sutra* were the inspiration for Asanga and Vasubandhu to build their system of philosophy.

Q: I'm unclear as to the relationship of the relative to the notional conceptual.
A: The relative itself is the ideally absolute, but the notional-conceptual, which consists of all the habitual patterns, constructs subject and object dualism onto the relative. So, you see it as that, rather than as the ideally absolute. The notional-conceptual constructs what is not there onto the relative, so you don't see the relative in its original state. You have changed it, constructed it into something else.

The relative and the ideally absolute are not two different states. They are presented as two different things, because of the way we see it. On the relative level, on every day experience, we see it as relative. If we get enlightened, then we would see it as ideally absolute. That's the only difference. To put it philosophically, it's an epistemological difference, not an ontological difference.

Q: So the order of these three is logical, rather than an evolution of one into another?
A: That's right. That evolution of consciousness really consists of the construction of subject and object onto the relative, the superimposition of subject and object onto the relative.

Q: You called these the three constitutive principles. Constitutive principles of what?

A: Constitutive principles of reality. They are three grades of reality, in some sense, in a hierarchical order. But two of them are really just relative. They are every day experience, but they do not exist in an ultimate sense. The ideally absolute exists in the ultimate sense.

Q: Where do belief in the self and belief in dharmas come into this?
A: The two-fold ego comes from the notional-conceptual. That is constructed upon the relative.

Q: When you get rid of your conflicting emotions and belief in the self and in dharmas, does that eliminate the third level or does it show the relative to be the absolute?
A: It shows the relative to be the absolute. Once the subject and object distinction is removed, then the relative is revealed as the ideally absolute.

Q: What do you mean by *when things become exhausted*?
A: Exhausted of traces and dispositions. We see things in a dualistic manner, because traces and dispositions coerce us into acting in a neurotic way. That produces further neuroses and further traces and dispositions, so we continue to see the whole thing that way. Once the content of the substratum of awareness is exhausted, then the substratum begins to reveal itself as the ideally absolute, within which there is no distinction between what is perceived and the conscious state which is doing the perceiving.

Q: Because we're in this process, we automatically leave traces, so the process becomes perpetual. How can we exhaust a perpetual process?
A: That's what we have to discuss: how it can be exhausted. Hopefully, we will be able to do that.

Why should there be traces and dispositions? Why should there be a substratum of awareness to begin with?

In a way, this talk is a digression from the main theme, but I thought it's important to have some understanding of the metaphysical aspects of Yogacara philosophy. We will not be too concerned with this aspect, because we are dealing with a psychological text, not a metaphysically oriented text. Yogacara philosophy is a system, so it has different texts that deal with different subjects.

Q: From the relative level, is absolute truth realised through logic and intellect or through meditation?
A: Both, but mainly through meditation.

Q: How does all this relate to the state of a child? When you talk about evolution, is it something that we had once and are striving for again, or didn't we have it before?
A: There's a long range evolution that takes place from one end of the scale to the other, ever since we came into existence until we attain enlightenment, and there's a short range evolution which takes place from childhood until we die.

A child would be going through that type of intellectual development. At first, the child wouldn't necessarily be aware of subject and object. Then the consciousness becomes more and more determinate and sophisticated. Evolution takes place that way. Also, we carry certain traces and dispositions from former lives. If we go along with the Buddhists, we have to see it that way. There would be genetic influences, as far as our growth is concerned, but at the same time there are also mental dispositions that modify our behaviour. Not everything is genetic.

Q: Does that mean there is a substratum of unconscious contents in a baby?
A: Sure. What happens is that the baby begins to, in a way, manipulate the traces and dispositions, so the consciousness becomes more and more defined and determinate.

As far as the other evolution is concerned, Buddhists would say that if there's a child genius, that would mostly be due to the accumulation of former dispositions, rather than being purely biological.

So there's evolution on that level, on a higher scale.

Q: If a newborn infant is not self conscious and makes no distinction of subject and object, does that mean the Buddhist path is seeking a return to the lost innocence of infancy?
A: Sounds very Freudian.

Q: I ask that precisely because your earlier remark does touch on Western psychological models.
A: I don't think we are trying to regain our innocence. It's about discovering how this whole evolution has taken place and where we have mismanaged certain things, and being able to integrate our consciousness. It has become so fragmented, in some sense. That's what *vikalpa* or conceptual paraphernalia means. The consciousness is, in a way, totally centreless, jumping all over the place, without any real point around which the other conscious experiences can revolve.

Q: If you realise the ideally absolute, how do you then relate to the notional-conceptual?
A: If you've realised the ideally absolute, then the notional-conceptual would cease to function. The notional-conceptual exists due to the traces and dispositions, which are stored in the substratum of awareness. The cessation of the notional-conceptual is the same as the cessation of traces and dispositions. The substratum of awareness begins to become contentless.

Q: Are you saying there is no necessity for notional and conceptual activity?
A: Yes.

Still, there might be subject and object. The cessation of the perception of subject and object does not mean that everything just becomes one, that subject and object become one thing. The way we experience it begins to change.

We don't make sharp distinctions, because the more we do so, the more we respond in an emotive way. That leaves all kinds of impressions, which force us to

act in an even more emotional way, and so it goes. But if we become less determined in our way of looking at the whole thing in a dualistic framework, then we have more chance of seeing things as they are, rather than as we want to see them. In order to be able to see things as they are, we have to try to look at things in a less dualistic way, which at the same time cuts through our habitual pattern.

Q: What's the difference between seeing things as they are and seeing things from an emotive point of view?
A: Normally, we see things in different ways because of our backgrounds. We don't see a thing in its entirety.

For instance, if a person falls out of a window, a physicist might say it's the law of gravitation and a psychologist might say that the person had a frustrated life, so they jumped. People really see things in different ways. Which is okay, but the more we are able to see things in a less subjective way, the more we are able to see things as they are, rather than interpreting them, using ourselves as a reference point.

Q: If you're in a certain situation, but then start remembering things about another situation, are those memories just left over traces from that situation?
A: Yes, I think so.

Q: Is it possible that those traces are seeing the situation as it is?
A: As long as there are traces and dispositions, we don't see things in a real way. There might be degrees of validity in our perception, but still, as long as there are traces and dispositions we would see things due to those influences, rather than seeing things in a proper perspective.

Q: There are certain times when I can perceive something less dualistically than at other times. There sometimes seems to be some conflict between that and my being in the world.
A: Each individual really sees things in his or her own way. That is an ordinary experience. It is nothing special. But, at the same time, there are possibilities of seeing things in a proper perspective. Sometimes, as you've said, we are able to see things in a less dualistic way, especially if we view art or appreciate the beauty of nature. I think that's a less dualistic way of looking at the whole thing. Sometimes there is the possibility of seeing whatever we're seeing in its entirety, rather than in a fragmented way, which normally happens.

Q: Does that mean that everyone who is enlightened sees a thing in the same way?
A: In a way that's true, yes. A proper perspective means we don't have to see a thing as if it's for us or against us, which tends to be our normal activity. Should I hug it and take it away, or should I leave it and ignore it? Or we might build all kinds of resentment, because of our past association with a particular object, whatever it is. Enlightened beings wouldn't necessarily see things in that kind of context, either for or against you, but just see the things as they are.

Q: If you look at what is happening as a third party who is not involved and see the cause of it and the result from it, would that perception be less dualistic?
A: In a way, that's true. It shows us how the influence of our past association with certain situations modifies our behaviour in a particular context. A third person would see the situation much more clearly than the people involved in it, because the situation is charged with all kinds of emotional overtones. If a third person is not emotionally entangled with the situation, he or she would be able to see things in a proper perspective.

Q: If one doesn't react mentally, then karma isn't made?
A: That's right. I think that's what we try to learn in meditation. We are trying to become unhabitual. When you meditate, you might think your mind has to be calm. You have some presupposition or assumptions about what meditation is supposed to be. If you feel aggressive in meditation, your instinct might be to respond aggressively towards your own aggression. You might think, "This is really bad, this shouldn't be happening." But in meditation we learn how not to respond in that kind of way. It could be that your meditation is progressing very well and you think you should not lose that state. You might grasp at that. You need to refrain from that kind of response as well. What you try to do is to look at your own emotional state directly, without reacting to it as you would in normal circumstances. You first practise that with your own emotional states, before you do it with others.

Q: So, initially, there's got to be some removal of yourself from your immediate emotional reaction, to be able to see situations properly?
A: Yes. You begin to observe your own emotional states.

Q: Then later, when that is strengthened, you can utilise the full energy of the emotions without stepping back from them?
A: Yes. That comes later on, when you really understand what emotions are about. Normally, we are not able to learn about emotions. We instinctively react to our own emotions in an emotional way and are unable to explore the nature of emotions properly. We are unable to do that, because we are already biased when we look at the whole thing. The more we are able to look at the emotions from a non biased point of view, the more we would be able learn about the nature of the emotions, whereby we might discover that emotions are really not something terrible or bad.

Proofs

Yogacarins believe that there are three levels of consciousness. First, there is an indeterminate, as well as unconscious, state. Out of that develops the egocentric notion, and out of that develops the six sense faculties, as well as the experience of the objective side of the six sense faculties.

All these things are explained in terms of our own experience. Yogacarins are not much interested in whether the objects of our sense perception exist in an ultimate sense. They are much more interested in how we experience things.

We are going to find out what sort of proofs they offer, in terms of the three levels of consciousness. I think that is important, because, first, we need to have some kind of philosophical or psychological background to what the Yogacarins are trying to explain. Then, we'll be able to put that into our spiritual growth, as well as our meditative experiences. We have to know how the Yogacarin tries to explain our mind, how the mind operates and how the mind perceives the phenomenal world.

At the beginning, there is what is known as the *alayavijnana*. I've gone along with Professor Guenther and translated that as *substratum of awareness*. *Alaya* means *substratum* and *vijna* means *awareness* or *consciousness*. The alayavijnana is a state of consciousness which is totally indeterminate, which means that, at this stage, our consciousness is neither virtuous nor non virtuous. It's not psychologically wholesome or unwholesome. It's completely neutral and indeterminate in its characteristics, but has the ability to retain traces and dispositions.

Whatever we experience leaves some kind of impression on the substratum of awareness, which in turn coerces us into acting in a particular manner. That again makes it possible for us to leave some impression on the substratum and then, when those traces and dispositions get actualised, we again act in a particular way. So, the whole cycle begins to revolve that way.

The interpreters of Yogacarin philosophies have disagreed somewhat. Some have said that traces and dispositions should be completely indeterminate, while others have said that traces and dispositions should be determinate. The tradition we are following here suggests that the traces and dispositions should be indeterminate.

The reason traces and dispositions should be indeterminate is because whatever we do leaves impressions on the substratum of awareness which are on a dormant level, on a potential level. When the traces and dispositions are actualised, when the potentials are actualised, then whatever is implicit becomes explicit. So, there is a difference. If the traces and dispositions are determinate, then there wouldn't be any difference between them and our own experience of the traces and dispositions when they get actualised.

If we put it in karmic terms, we create good karma or bad karma and it leaves some impressions on the substratum of awareness. If the impression is not indeterminate, then the impression itself would be the same as our experience of the result of the karma. So, in some sense, there would be no difference between the cause and the effect.

What is suggested here is that, in terms of our experience of the whole situation, we would not be able to explain the differences between cause and effect unless we regard the cause and the potential state of traces and dispositions as being indeterminate and our experience of it as being determinate.

Indeterminate means that the traces and dispositions left on the substratum of awareness are not necessarily virtuous or non virtuous, but are, in some sense, completely undefined. They're not explicit, but implicit. They become virtuous or non virtuous when we begin to experience, when the whole thing gets actualised.

One proof offered to prove that the substratum of awareness exists is that the substratum of awareness has relative permanence, whereas all other conscious experiences are completely temporal. We experience pain, we experience pleasure, one conscious experience gets replaced by others. Whatever we experience gets intercepted by some other experience. We can't explain our personal identity by that kind of conscious process, so Yogacara says that there must be a substratum of awareness which is the basis or the possibility for all the other experiences that we have. Pain, pleasure and so on actually function due to the fact that we have a substratum of awareness.

Also, our experiences of pain and pleasure leave traces and dispositions on the substratum of awareness, which in turn create more pain and pleasure, and so it goes. That is the Yogacarin way of explaining samsara, cyclic existence.

The substratum of awareness is not completely permanent, like a piece of stone or the sky. It is temporal, but has relative permanence. A traditional analogy is that a stone has greater durability than a sesame seed, but the stone doesn't have any scent. The sesame seed, which has less durability than the stone, is perfumed. In a similar way, the substratum of awareness is not eternal, but because it has relative permanence, it is perfumed. It changes continuously. A previous state of the substratum can influence the next state, but it has more durability than the rest of the consciousness.

Now, we come to the stage where we can discuss traces and dispositions. Traces and dispositions mean the impressions left behind on the substratum of awareness. The Tibetan term for that is *bag chags*. If we analyse the Tibetan, *bag* means *covered* or *camouflaged* and *chags* means *existing*. So, *existing in a camouflaged way*. Traces and dispositions are not experienced consciously. They're experienced on an unconscious level, so they're are known as something that exists in a camouflaged way. The Sanskrit term *vasana* has the same kind of implication. It also means something like perfuming, something that leaves behind traces and dispositions.

It is said that all kinds of traces and dispositions exist on the level of the substratum of awareness. We go through hundreds of experiences in one day and all kinds of impressions are left behind, but only certain impressions or traces and dispositions get actualised. This is so, because it depends upon what stimulates a particular response. It might sound a bit modern, but this is so.

Traces and dispositions cannot get actualised randomly, all over the place, without any kind of order. There is some order, because certain situations would provoke certain traces and dispositions, other situations would provoke other traces and dispositions. So, there is no chaos. It is not as if any of the traces and dispositions could be actualised at any time and space, so the whole thing goes

berserk at that level. There is some order, in terms of what gets actualised first. Then, other potentialities can follow suit.

There is some homogeneity in the interaction between the stimulant and the stimulus. They are not contradictory. An aggressive situation would provoke an aggressive response. If someone screams at you, 99% of the time you scream back. It's quite straightforward. That homogeneity is known as *rgumthum* in Tibetan.

As I have already mentioned, the traces and dispositions are completely indeterminate. We could use the example of sugar. Sugar is indeterminate, in some sense. It is in a potential state. It could be put into a cup of tea or coffee or it could be applied to a piece of cheesecake and it gets absorbed into whatever it's applied to. The application of the sugar determines what characteristic the sugar is going to assume. If it's applied to a piece of cheesecake, then the sugar begins to get absorbed into the cheesecake. If it's applied to coffee, then it begins to get absorbed into coffee.

In a similar way, traces and dispositions are indeterminate, but what is indeterminate can become determinate, depending upon the external circumstances, as much as the sugar gets influenced by a foreign element. The indeterminate state is called *lung-ma-bstan.*

Another proof offered to prove that the substratum of awareness exists is that, unless there is a substratum of awareness, we would not be able to take rebirth. It is only due to the fact that there is a substratum of awareness that we are able to take rebirth.

Buddhists have completely rejected the notion of atma or soul as expounded in the Hindu tradition and also as it is expounded in most Occidental traditions. Yogacara philosophy says that, unless there is a substratum of awareness, there is no reason why there should be reincarnation. Because most of our conscious experiences are temporary, there is no reason why there should be a personal identity. Why should there be the same person reincarnating and experiencing the same things that one has experienced in the past? It is said that it is the substratum of awareness which endures the experience of different lifetimes and is able to retain the traces and dispositions of previous lives. Sometimes we are able to recall certain incidents that took place in our previous lives. Those sort of incidents take place due to the fact that there is some kind of personal identity. It's said that it is not the soul, but the substratum of awareness, which is able to retain those memories.

There is a basic difference between the theistic notion of soul and Yogacara's notion of substratum of awareness. According to the theistic tradition, the soul is something eternal. It exists during our condemned state, as well as when we are redeemed, as they say, when we begin to dwell in the heavenly realm. But, according to Yogacara philosophy, the substratum of awareness has only relative permanence. We must remember that it is not eternal. It does not persist indefinitely.

The third proof offered to prove that the substratum of awareness exists is that, when a person is in a coma or in a state of amnesia, there must be something which rules the integrity of that particular personality. That, it is said, must be the substratum of awareness, because the rest of the conscious experience is not

explicit. There must be some kind of unconscious level of personal identity which actually persists during those times. So, the substratum must exist on that level.

The second development of consciousness is known as *egocentric mentation* or *manovijnana*. This is the centre of our conscious experience, as well as our egocentric notions. Most of our philosophical as well as theological notions of soul come from this particular experience. We feel that there is some kind of personality, that there is some kind of soul. This strong emotion comes from egocentric mentation.

It is said that egocentric mentation is the aspect of consciousness which we have to deal with in our practice. If there was no egocentric mentation, we would not have neuroses and emotional instabilities. So, practice comes down to uprooting or making a proper assessment of the egocentric mentation.

The first proof offered to prove that egocentric mentation exists is that if there was no egocentric mentation, then we would be completely altruistic. We would be able to constantly work for the benefit of others and not feel anything selfish about ourselves. The reason we feel selfish and are egocentric most of the time is due to the fact that we have this particular aspect of consciousness.

The second proof offered is that when we enter into meditative absorption, the sense faculties begin to cease, other types of conscious experience begin to diminish somewhat, but still, there's strong egocentric activity. We might feel that our meditation has progressed so well that we sometimes begin to wonder how we have actually been able to achieve that sort of state. This type of experience exists due to the egocentric mentation. We might think that other conscious experiences have ceased, but still, egocentric mentation is operating and persisting throughout our meditative absorption. It doesn't have to be the case in all meditative states, but it does happen.

The third proof offered is that, unless egocentric mentation exists, whatever wholesome act we try to perform would be totally immaculate and wholesome and there would be no emotional embellishments or emotional overtones involved. If we put it in Buddhist terms, if we try to create good karma by participating in prayers or doing meditation, it would automatically be immaculate. But that is not the case. Sometimes we try to create good karma, but it is not free from emotional overtones. So, due to that fact, egocentric mentation is involved in the experience of spiritual practice.

In brief, it seems that whenever we are concerned with ourselves, whenever there is any notion of *I*, whenever it comes to our subjective experiences, we inevitably experience some form of egocentricity. This influences all the inputs we receive from the objective side. The whole thing gets processed that way and, in the end, we have some kind of wrong assessment of the whole situation.

Also, egocentric mentation mistakenly believes that the substratum of awareness is our soul or ego. A second type of mistaken notion is that egocentric mentation begins to get obsessively concerned with oneself, with one's own ego, and the third is that egocentric mentation begins to develop a tremendous sense of arrogance, which includes self-effaciveness, putting oneself down.

So, that is the second level of development of consciousness.

The third development of consciousness is actually quite straightforward and is something which we experience constantly. The evolution we have presented so

far is completely removed or remote from our daily experience. The third level of consciousness is the six sense consciousnesses.

According to Buddhist psychology, there are the five consciousnesses related to the five senses and then there's the sixth one, which is what we call empirical mind, the mind that we normally experience. The five senses receive inputs from the five sense fields. With the sixth one, the mental aspect, the empirical mind, we are able to perceive mental images.

The relationship between these three levels of consciousness is that whatever inputs we might have from our experience of the objective side is perceived by the six sense consciousnesses. Egocentric mentation performs some kind of editing process and that leaves traces and dispositions on the substratum of awareness. The whole process takes place in that order.

When it comes to the stage where the traces and dispositions are going to be actualised, they get processed through egocentric mentation and then actualised through the six sense consciousnesses.

So, it goes both ways. First the input and then the output take place and, as we can see, egocentric mentation seems to be the centre point in our ordinary type of experience.

We are going to discover that when we develop spiritually, egocentric mentation is completely dispensed with, the substratum of awareness gets transformed and the six sense consciousnesses remain as they are. They do not get transformed, because they don't contain any emotional overtones. It is egocentric mentation which is responsible for any wrong judgment or wrong assessment that we tend to perform in ordinary experience. Once that is dispensed with, then whatever we experience or perceive is going to be much more straightforward and much more clear.

I think this whole thing is going to become quite clear as we go along. It is important to have some intellectual background to the whole situation of what's taking place. Then, we can discuss how spiritual discipline begins to develop and how all the nice things take place.

We could stop at this point. If you have any questions, you're welcome.

Q: What do you exactly mean by *determinate* and *indeterminate*?
A: *Determinate* means karmically wholesome or unwholesome, *indeterminate* means neither wholesome nor unwholesome. If you are hungry and have a pizza, that would leave only indeterminate traces and dispositions.

Q: Is the ability to remember part of the substratum?
A: Yes. Any memory that we have is related to the substratum of awareness.

Q: If awareness is applied at the point when an emotional reaction is arising, wouldn't that bring clarity and not create new vasanas?
A: Yes, that's right. We'll be discussing that in subsequent talks, how we can stop that. First there are the six sense consciousnesses, then egocentric mentation and then the substratum of awareness. In meditation, what we do is try to find out how that whole process takes place. Which is not very difficult at all, in many ways.

Q: Whatever we learn in meditation, we ultimately have to apply in our day-to-day life. Would that be where one applies the awareness one might have developed in meditation?
A: I think so, yes. First we have to talk about it, as we are doing tonight. In fact, we have to find out whether there are such things as three levels of consciousness. We don't know. A lot of you might doubt the whole situation: there's no problem there. We have to explore and see whether there is such a thing as substratum of awareness, if there is such a thing as egocentric mentation. I think we wouldn't doubt the six sense consciousnesses, they're too immediate. But we have to see that, and the only way we can do that is through meditation. But if we begin to see the whole thing in a much clearer way, we could apply that to day-to-day life situations.

Q: Where does the desire to become enlightened come from? Is it traces and disposition?
A: Yes. The desire to attain enlightenment also comes from certain traces and dispositions left behind from some previous experience. Not everyone feels that way, so there's a reason why, in a particular situation, we feel that way. According to Buddhist tradition, it could be due to our previous lives.

Q: You were saying that the substratum is only relatively permanent. Does that mean that at some point the substratum ceases to exist? Is that what we call enlightenment?
A: In some sense, it ceases to exist. In some ways, the substratum gets transformed into something positive.

The substratum is indeterminate. There's no distinction between subject and object. That indeterminate state could be very vague and very confused or it could be very sharp, completely perspicuous and very straightforward.

In our ordinary experience, the substratum would be very vague and foggy. On the enlightened stage, it is very sharp. There is no distinction between subject and object, but still, there's tremendous clarity. So, it gets transformed.

Q: You lost me with the example of the sesame seed and the stone.
A: A stone has more durability than a sesame seed. The stone lasts relatively forever, whereas the sesame seed has only a temporary existence. In a similar way, the substratum of awareness has only relative permanence. It's not like the stone or the sky. Those are traditional analogies.

If the substratum of awareness is eternal, then it wouldn't be able to contain any traces and dispositions. The reason it contains traces and dispositions is because it is going through certain transformations. You experience certain things that leave traces and dispositions, then they get actualised due to certain circumstances. That leaves other traces and dispositions and then they get actualised and so on. So, it continues that way.

The substratum of awareness could not be eternal. It's not something solid that exists forever. If it's eternal, then you wouldn't be able to become enlightened, due

to the fact that the substratum of awareness couldn't be transformed into something else. If it's eternal and solid, you can't change that.

Q: Are you linking the generation of these traces to that perfume coming off the sesame seed? It's a process you're talking about.
A: Yes.

Q: I can't understand the idea of relative permanence.
A: The sesame seed is something relatively impermanent. It is fresh and gives off a certain scent. A stone is quite permanent, compared to the sesame seed. And it's not fresh. You could come across a stone that has been existing for millions of years. It's quite a straightforward, dull analogy, in some sense.

Only something that is fresh, that is going through transformations, would be able to retain traces. So, it has to be a fresh process that is taking place, constantly. But, at the same time, it is not completely impermanent. It has relative permanence.

Our ordinary conscious experience is totally impermanent. We experience pain, pleasure, ups and downs. We go through all that sort of thing each minute, in most cases.

The substratum of awareness wouldn't necessarily go through that scale of impermanence, but still, it is impermanent and not eternal.

Because it's not eternal, it is able to get transformed into wisdom. When you get enlightened, the substratum of awareness gets transformed into something that does not retain traces and dispositions any more. It's not that the substratum of awareness does not retain traces and dispositions, but that person does not leave any traces and dispositions. So, you are able to perceive the substratum as it is.

In some sense, egocentric mentation is acting as a veil, so you're unable to come to grips with the substratum of awareness, you're unable to come to grips with the unconscious state. The only way you're able to do that is to work through egocentric mentation, which is the centre of all our emotional and neurotic tendencies. That is what coerces us into acting in the same way and develops all kinds of inveterate tendencies.

Q: Would dream yoga be a way of exploring the substratum of awareness?
A: Very much so. The dream yoga of Tibetan Buddhism is really designed to see how egocentric mentation operates in terms of the editing processes. It's supposed to make you become aware in the dream state. You see how you get excited, due to certain dream images, but there's really nothing to get excited about. That type of practice is supposed to make you see how you do that, and the reason why you do that.

According to Buddhism, dream images are nothing but traces and dispositions of waking, conscious experiences. In the dream state, those things get actualised, in some sense. So, we have to learn how those things take place and how they are getting edited through our egocentric mentation.

Q: The first moment when you perceive a flower, do you just experience it and then in the next moment you start to pile on all the concepts: I like this, I don't like this, whatever? Is that first moment filtered through egocentric mentation?
A: Not necessarily. It could be due to the six sense consciousnesses. The six sense consciousnesses are indeterminate as well, actually. The substratum of awareness is also indeterminate. It's egocentric mentation that colours the whole vision, in some sense.

In some ways, egocentric mentation is the unwelcome guest who has chosen to inhibit. Practice is really trying to work out the unnecessary situation of having egocentric mentation. It's totally unnecessary. It seems to be that egocentric mentation is the centre whereby we feel there's some thing out there and there's *me* here. It's the origination of all dualistic experiences. That doesn't take place on the sensory level or on the substratum level. It takes place on the egocentric mentation stage.

We make distinctions and put everything into pigeon holes, which makes it very difficult for us to see things in their entirety. We only see things in parts. All kinds of constructions take place, which are not really there. That's not part of the property of the object that we are experiencing, it's a contribution of our own mind. But the contribution is not made by our senses, it's made by egocentric mentation.

Sometimes, we come in contact with certain situations, we see the whole situation properly and think that everything's really clear and in perspective. Then, the more we try to look at it and make a proper assessment of it, the more complicated it becomes. We may come up with some kind of clever answer that creates further complications. So, it goes that way. I think it's a similar kind of situation.

Q: You see a flower and that's the first contact. The next thing that arises is that it's beautiful or fragrant, which is egocentric consciousness. My experience is that if no reaction arises by just seeing something, then it's like being a zombie or a robot, which does not have the faculty of thinking. So that's not a clear mind, either.
A: That's a very good question. We'll be discussing this later on, when we talk about the five wisdoms.

We talk about mirror-like wisdom, which means your mind is like a mirror. Everything is reflected on it, but the mind does not impose any kind of judgment, because any judgment that you make is not related to any property of the object. Any judgment you make would be the mind's own contribution to the object. It has nothing to do with the object that you're perceiving. But, at the same time, that does not lead to any kind of vagueness.

There's what's known as discriminating wisdom. Discriminating wisdom has nothing to do with seeing one object as being better than another, but you're able to make a proper assessment of every single object. You see the object in its own perspective, without getting mixed up. It doesn't mean that you see everything as being the same and everything is cool. There's a distinction, but that distinction is not imposed upon the object by our own conceptual paraphernalia or vikalpa. It has nothing to do with conceptual paraphernalia. You begin to see things in their own perspective. Vikalpa is associated with the egocentric mentation.

Q: Every experience arises from the vasanas, doesn't it?
A: Somewhat. There are degrees of vasanas or traces and dispositions. Sometimes, our perception is less influenced by our traces and dispositions than in other circumstances.

The more emotional we are, the more our perception is influenced by vasanas. That's what it all boils down to. If we are emotionally charged in a given circumstance, then we would see things in a distorted manner. The less our perception is charged with emotion, the less we would see things in that self-distorted way.

I don't think every perception would be distorted by traces and dispositions. Some perceptions could be quite clear. I think that takes place occasionally, but it's not a daily experience. That's what we're trying to talk about.

Also, the substratum of awareness is the seat of enlightenment. It not only the seat of samsara and getting confused, it's the key to enlightenment at the same time. It's something very personal. It's something we experience constantly. It's not something remote and inaccessible.

Q: What do you mean by *mentation*?
A: Mentation just means mental act. Egocentric mentation means egocentric mental act. So, it simply means being egocentric, egocentric thinking. Anything to do with the *I*, *me*, is egocentric mentation. If you go to a cafe and they give you a diluted cup of coffee, you say "*I* didn't get my money's worth."

Q: How does anything exist without having any sort of distinguishing characteristic? People have characteristics which distinguish them from each other. Is that related to egocentric mentation?
A: Not necessarily.

When we talk about working through our habitual patterns, it doesn't mean we all become the same, that we all operate the same way. Enlightened beings wouldn't necessarily operate in the same way. There's no uniform activity.

Sakyamuni Buddha was a monk, but the coming Buddha is not supposed to be a monk. Instead of sitting cross-legged under a bodhi tree, he sits on a chair. Very modernised, very proper.

We can't think all these beings act in the same way. It doesn't mean that everybody begins to behave in the same way. All it means is that we don't make the same mistakes and errors, again and again. Which we normally tend to do.

Normally, we feel that "Wherever I go, things are the same. It doesn't make any difference. Wherever I go, there are problems everywhere." But if we look inside, we might begin to learn more things, in some sense.

Instead of thinking "There are problems all around me", just ask, "Why is it that some people don't experience problems in certain circumstances, but experience them in other circumstances?" You might experience problems in some circumstance, while other people don't experience any problems in that circumstance, but they would experience problems in some other circumstance. There's some kind of habitual, in-built tendency to react in a particular way, due to our own inveterate tendencies.

Q: Inveterate tendencies are when somebody screams at you, you scream back?
A: That and our own idiosyncratic way of responding to things, our own individual style of responding to things. We have accumulated those things as well, which have something to do with the traces and dispositions that we are talking about.

Q: So, if you're involved in a situation that's very emotionally charged, it's your reaction at that time that counts. If someone screams at me, it's my reaction that matters more than anything else.
A: You have to make some kind of proper assessment of why that particular person is doing that, but at the same time, you have to learn how you are responding to it, how you have responded to that type of situation in the past. A lot of the time, we don't want to look into the situation from our own point of view. We might think, "All people are the same. They're all creating problems for me." We have to see why we are responding in that way.

It's a common problem and it depends on the substratum of awareness. Traces and dispositions are built up and we respond that way. So what we are going to be discussing is really some kind of unlearning process.

Q: The substratum of awareness is indeterminate and traces and dispositions require stimulants to arise. Doesn't that statement imply dependent origination?
A: Yes.

Q: So in the ultimate sense, it is unreal.
A: Yes, that's right. If we put it in the metaphysical context that we were talking about, it comes under the relative and the notional-conceptual. They are not really real, in an ultimate sense.

When we are talking about Yogacarin metaphysics, the relative really means things depend upon each other. Subject depends upon object. What is the subject, if there is no object to be perceived? What is the perceiver? It doesn't make any sense. An object without a perceiver is useless. If there's a world without any sentient beings to perceive it, that world has no function whatsoever. Objects depend upon each other, so that is the relative.

But the very fact that they depend upon each other means they are not real, because what is real is completely independent. What is independent is the ideally absolute, which is the substratum of awareness. It does not depend upon subject and object. That's putting it in a metaphysical context.

Q: Is this breakdown that you've given us applicable to all schools of Buddhism?
A: It is particular to Yogacara philosophy, both in a metaphysical sense as well as in a psychological sense. The eight levels of consciousness, six levels of reality and three constitutive principles are very much a Yogacara way of presenting the whole thing.

Buddhists mostly talk about two levels of truth: absolute and relative. It doesn't matter what school of Buddhism it is. And they only talk about six

consciousnesses, never about eight levels of consciousness. The six consciousnesses mean the five senses and the empirical consciousness, the mind that we're normally in contact with. When we see something, we think "That is an object of some sort." Whatever we perceive, there is some consciousness that makes a proper assessment of the whole thing. So, there are just six consciousnesses.

But in Yogacara, there are eight levels of consciousness: the six, then egocentric mentation and the substratum of awareness. The interesting thing is that Yogacara philosophers were the ones who really meditated and practised in India. Not that the others didn't meditate and practise, but at some stage people were getting intellectually rigorous, but weren't practising very much. Yogacara philosophy developed out of that kind of background.

Yogacara means *practitioners of yoga*. It doesn't have anything to do with yoga, as we normally understand it - bending backwards or forwards - but doing meditation and applying some kind of introspective method, observing our own conscious experiences.

Q: If this is the teaching of Buddha , how can it be Yogacara philosophy alone?

A: Buddhist tradition, like everything else, has gone through stages and, gradually, some sophistication has developed due to that. The basic principles are the same, whatever school it is.

Early Buddhism put emphasis on the object, as well as the subject. There was equal emphasis. If we put it in a more technical way, then we could say there's the same emphasis on matter and mind.

Then, Madhyamika philosophy came along, which said that mind and matter are equally unreal. They're both empty, sunyata.

Yogacara philosophy put more emphasis on experience and mind than on the objective side. It didn't deny the existence of the object, but said it is useless to speculate about the existence of the world if we don't know what it is. We just have to find out how we experience the world. The whole thing is very much related to personal experience.

That led to the development of Buddhist tantra, which was the culmination of Buddhist tradition. Zen tradition came out of Yogacara philosophy as well, which is, again, somewhat related to the tantric tradition. The tantric tradition was the last, and I think that a certain amount of understanding Yogacara would enhance understanding tantra properly. Tantric tradition tries to combine Madhyamika and Yogacara philosophy, with some bias towards Yogacara philosophy, in some sense.

The Five Skandhas: An Introduction

Whatever you might think of the proofs offered by the Yogacarins in defence of the existence of three levels of consciousness, we should appreciate the fact that they at least tried to offer some kind of proof, without asserting the whole thing in a dogmatic way.

We are going to discuss the classic Buddhist five skandhas. Some of you might think you have the five skandhas coming out of your ears, because you have heard about them so much, but the way the five skandhas are interpreted by the Yogacarins is slightly different from the standard Buddhist interpretation. We could also look at them in the context of the general Yogacara framework.

Five *skandhas* could be translated as five *psychophysical constituents*. If you want to reduce that, then they come under the heading of *name and form*. This is a standard Buddhist contention. *Name* doesn't mean the name we possess, but stands for our consciousness, and *form* stands for our body. So, there is some kind of mind-body problem here.

The mind-body problem has been dealt with in the Western tradition quite thoroughly, as well. Most of the time, ever since Plato, people regard the body as something bad and worthless because it is mutable, while the soul which resides in the body is regarded as immortal and something worthwhile to cherish.

In the West, a lot of theories have been offered, as far as the relationship between the mind and body is concerned.

There is what is known as the theory of psychophysical parallelism, which means that body is one thing and mind another. They don't interact at all. They work like two clocks which just happen to exhibit the same time, but there's no visible relationship between the two. Then, there is the theory of interactionism, which means that the mind and body interact. That's how we normally see the situation, I think - a common sense approach to the whole thing.

Buddhists would go along with that, that mind and body interact. There is an explanation offered as to how they interact, but it is assumed that they do interact and we normally take it to be so.

The first psychophysical constituent is known as *form*. Form refers to the body. There isn't very much to say about this, except that you have a body. Whatever physical stature you might possess is regarded as body.

The next one is known as *feeling*. An interesting thing here is that, in this particular Yogacara text, the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, feeling is not interpreted as our normal notion of pleasure and pain, but is interpreted in regard to Yogacara's contention about traces and dispositions. From this point of view, not everything is regarded as feeling.

Traces and dispositions are provoked by certain situations, then we go through certain resultant experiences. The experience that we go through as a result of the actualisation of traces and dispositions is regarded as feeling.

It is said that if the traces and dispositions happen to be positive, then our experience of the feelings that accompany that experience would also be positive and healthy. If the traces and dispositions happen to be negative, then the experience that we go through would be negative as well. There is some homogeneous continuity that exists between what is potential and what is actual.

Yogacara criticises early Buddhists for saying that all neutral feelings which we have when there is no pleasure or pain come from the accumulation of good karma or from healthy traces and dispositions. Yogacara says that neutrality is an aspect of the substratum of awareness, but it has nothing to do with the resultant experience of karma, of traces and dispositions, because as soon as there is any manifestation of karma, then it is no longer neutral. It has already assumed some kind of determination.

The third skandha is known as *perception*. Perception is defined as being that particular mental process where the conscious process begins to become selective. Certain things are taken in, while other inputs are left out. So, some kind of editing process takes place.

If we direct our attention to a particular object, then we don't mistake that object for something else. There is clearly defined perception taking place. If we are in a noisy place, we don't get distracted, but can draw our attention to a particular sensory presentation.

So, it is said that the third psychophysical constituent has the function of making a proper assessment of the outside sensory inputs, as well as making a proper assessment of and giving some order to the mental processes. Our thoughts and perceptions are ordered, rather than being chaotic. That orderliness comes from the third psychophysical constituent.

The fourth one is known as *conception*. Conception has the function of directing our mind to a particular object, taking interest in a particular object.

There is some kind of intention. Our conscious experience is intentional. If we have a thought, there is something that we think about. If we will something, there is something that is willed. Every single mental process has some directiveness of its own. Conception has that function.

The fifth skandha is empirical consciousness, which we have talked about earlier on. In terms of the three levels of consciousness, the last one is identical with the empirical consciousness which we are talking about here. It's related to the five sense organs.

If we look at the five psychophysical constituents in the context of the three levels of consciousness, then feeling, perception and conception would come under the heading of egocentric mentation, while the body and the rest of the consciousness would stem from the substratum of awareness. The last level is empirical consciousness itself. As we can see, egocentric mentation manifests in different ways through the five psychophysical constituents.

Maybe we could have a discussion on this.

Q: I've heard that there's a debate within Buddhist thinking about the definition of the skandha of form being the body or actually being the nerve endings.

A: In this particular context, it is our body. There's no question about that. Nerve endings are part of the body, so there is no problem there. The skandha of the body encompasses everything, including the brain. Which is why we can't accept certain materialist interpretations of mind. We can't explain away mind by studying our brain processes or nerve endings.

That's why Buddhists assume some form of the theory of interactionism. The mind and body interact with each other and depend upon each other, but at the

same time, they are quite separate. If you try explain everything just on the basis of physical things, then you would be formulating some kind of psychophysical identity theory, as they say, that the body and the mind are regarded as one thing.

Q: What happens at the time of death, when you haven't got a body? How does not having a skandha of form affect the rest of the skandhas?
A: During the death process, except for consciousness, you are supposed to withdraw from most of the skandhas. They begin to diminish and gradually lose their efficiency. Then, after the death process, they manifest again in the bardo state. It is only due to physical changes that they diminish. That brings about certain states of consciousness, but then, after the death process, consciousness begins to regain its power. If we look at the texts on death and dying, they would say that the consciousness goes through some changes, but then regains its power.

Q: Is the bardo body the skandhas come back again?
A: All you've got is consciousness. There's no body there. Sometimes it's called the subtle body, but the subtle body is not really a body. It's a mistaken notion of a heavenly body of some sort. Some people have almost died and then, when they were revived, they have said that they thought they had a body, but if they stumbled over something they didn't knock it over and then began to get really surprised. That's only the illusion of having a body, rather than having any concrete body as such.

Q: Egocentric consciousness remains during the death process?.
A: Yes. But egocentric mentation would have less efficacy than it would in an ordinary situation, when you are still alive. It is said that, due to the lack of efficiency of egocentric mentation, you could actually attain enlightenment if you are able to become conscious of what is happening during the bardo state. But it is still present.

Q: Why have a skandha of form? Why not include it in the skandha of empirical consciousness?
A: Because the body is different from consciousness. Body is not consciousness. A sense organ is not consciousness. We have to make a distinction between sense consciousness and sense organs. A sense organ is one thing and a sense consciousness is another.

Q: The sense consciousness arises because of the interaction between the sense organ and the sense field?
A: That's right.

Q: But that's different from the body.
A: There are three things involved. You have a sense field, you have a sense organ and then you have a sense consciousness. All three things have to converge, for you to be able to have any kind of sense perception. If one of your sense organs is damaged, then the sense consciousness and the sense field are present, but due to

your defective organ, you are unable to make a proper assessment of the situation. So, three things are involved.

Q: You said that Yogacara explains the second skandha, feeling, slightly differently from the ordinary way that we understood it.
A: Normally, any type of feeling that we might have is regarded as feeling. Yogacarins say that feeling really means any experience that we have which is the result of past karma or past traces and dispositions.

Generally, Buddhists would say that a neutral feeling is also feeling, but Yogacarins say a neutral feeling is no feeling at all, because how can you have a neutral feeling? Neutrality is part of the substratum of awareness: it's not ethically or psychologically wholesome or unwholesome. Pleasure or pain come as a result of traces and dispositions, so feeling is defined as being the result of your experience of past traces and dispositions. When the traces and dispositions get actualised, then that is feeling.

Q: I don't think that we ever experience a neutral feeling.
A: Early Buddhists, especially the Vaibhasikas, said that there is such a thing as neutral feeling and that it comes from creating wholesome karma, wholesome traces and dispositions. Yogacarins would say that that's not true. You can't have a neutral feeling as a result of wholesome karma or traces and dispositions.

Q: I understood the fourth skandha, conception, as memories or past habits. Is it the same thing?
A: No, there's a difference. Conception is not a habitual process. Its function is to direct our attention to a particular object.

What is consciousness? Consciousness means conscious of something, so every conscious act has a direction of some sort. There is some kind of directedness. There are two types of situation. We can direct our attention to a physical object or we could direct our attention to mental processes. Sometimes, we catch ourselves thinking about us thinking something. Your consciousness is able to reflect onto its own conscious processes, so that's conception. Which might not be a very good translation, but it seems to be standard.

Q: I've read where the first skandha was described as a basic flash of panic - "Do I exist or don't I?" - and then the other skandhas follow on to reinforce the notion of "I exist". How does that fit in with physical form?
A: You acquire physical form due to that panic. If we put it in this context, panic starts on the level of the substratum of awareness. At that stage, you would not be conscious of yourself as an individual person, but then, once that type of consciousness begins to take place, you wonder what's happening. Because of that, the need to assume a body begins to rise. In a way, the five psychophysical constituents develop along with the three levels of consciousness. They develop at the same time.

Q: Would that also be the cause of grasping at further physical form when you are in the bardo?
A: Yes. You feel forced. If you look at the whole situation properly, there's the possibility of seeing what is really taking place, seeing the whole process taking place.

Q: You said conception or samskara has the function of directing the mind to interest in an object. Could you give an example of giving direction to the mind, to interest in an object?
A: You are doing it now. You are directing your interest onto me. It is due to conception that you are able to direct your attention to me. Other functions are also involved, but it is due to conception that you are able to direct your attention to certain things and take interest on that level. There is some kind of directionality.

It took a long time for Western psychologists to find out that there is such a thing as intentionality of mind. It had to wait for Edmond Husserl to come along in Germany to say there is such a thing as intentionality of the mind.

But yes, it's a mental process, and the function of conception is to be able to direct the mind to a particular thing. You have a thought, then there is what is thought about. If you were thinking something, your mind is directed towards something.

Q: That's happening all the time?
A: Yes.

Q: What about during sleep?
A: During sleep, also. It takes place on the inner conscious level, as well as on the outside physical level. We are able to direct our attention to physical objects and we are also able to direct our consciousness towards the conscious process itself.

Q: Then it occurs in dreams, too?
A: Yes. In some sense, it's due to this that you are able to have dreams, because there are all kinds of things happening and then there is another spectator who is watching the whole thing. There's a kind of split, in some sense.

Q: You said something about *name and form.*
A: Yes. Form is the body. The rest of the four skandhas come under *name.* In Sanskrit, it is called *nama-rupa. Nama* means *name, rupa* means *form.*

Q: Does consciousness have to have an object?
A: Yes. That's what conception is. Conception really means that aspect of consciousness which is conscious of something. There is not one object, which you are conscious of all of the time. You could be conscious of a whole lot of things. If you hungry, you might think about food. If you want to have a stroll, then you would think about that. It varies.

Q: If feeling is either positive or negative, where does indifference fit in? Is there any such thing?
A: Not in this particular context.

Normally, neutral feeling is part of feeling, but Yogacara would say that neutral feeling is not neutral feeling at all. It depends upon what you are being indifferent about. If you are being indifferent, because you are trying to be cool and ignore the whole situation or because something is too insignificant for you to pay any attention, there is some motive involved. You can't be indifferent without any motive. So, as long as there is some motive behind it, then it's already a result of your traces and dispositions. That motive has arisen because of certain reasons.

Q: If you're in a situation where you don't feel pleasure or pain, then you really are feeling one or the other, you're just not recognising it?
A: Yes. You don't really think you are feeling neutral without any reason. If there's a reason, then you must have a feeling about it. The reason comes from our habitual tendencies and habitual tendencies are there because of traces and dispositions.

Q: If you feel indifferent about something, is that ignorance?
A: It could be ignorance, or maybe you have made a decision not to pay any attention because of some reason. It could be a clever device to get you out of trouble, to pretend that you are not really aware of what you are doing. It would depend upon the situation.

Q: Should one investigate those situations?
A: Yes, that's precisely what we're talking about. It's not good enough to say, "This is what the Yogacarins say, maybe it's true, maybe not." We have to reflect on the whole situation and see whether it is true or not, see how we respond to different situations, see whether these processes do take place or not, see what we feel about it. Some kind of reflection is necessary.

Q: We'd normally define indifference as just ignoring certain parts of our psychological or physical constituents, but I seem to have this fine line between indifference and feeling equalised about things.
A: Most of the time, when we are indifferent there is some kind of negative connotation. There's not enough interest involved.

Equilibrium might mean that you are trying not to be biased, not to let emotional overtones colour your perception of a situation. Equilibrium would have a positive overtone. It would be a good thing karmically. It would leave positive traces and dispositions. It is a karmic process on that level.

If you attain enlightenment, then there could be some level of equilibrium which is totally free from karmic tendencies, because you wouldn't leave traces and dispositions behind.

Q: The Reichian school of Western psychology says that the body imprisons feelings in a physical sense and that, in order to be psychologically healthy, we

have to break through the armour which imprisons our feelings and release them. How does that fit in with the relationship between body and the other skandhas which are in egocentric mentation?
A: I think that type of thing goes back to Plato, maybe earlier. The Greeks are responsible for thinking that the body is something which imprisons your soul. Descartes is responsible for that, too. For the last two or three thousand years, Western psychology and philosophy have been struggling with this notion and it has become a problem of the ghost in the machine, as they say.

As far as Buddhists are concerned, it is not necessarily so, because body and mind might not be two separate entities. There might be some relationship between the two and, due to the fact that the body and the mind are able to interact with each other, body is not viewed as something that entraps the consciousness or soul. Buddhists generally don't believe in soul and the body is not something that has entrapped consciousness, either.

Q: Would the Buddhist approach advocate or condone the purposeful release of feelings? In that type of therapy, you actualise these feelings. You seek them out and let them go. You lie on the floor and scream your head off.
A: I think a Buddhist would look at that as being useful, if it's done in the right way. A Buddhist would also try to encourage that person to reflect on the whole situation and not just think, "Now I've got that off my chest, I don't have to worry about it for the next couple of months" or think "If something happens, I can scream and get it done away with." It is quite healthy, but at the same time, that person really has to learn why that is happening, instead of thinking "It doesn't matter how it happened. As long as I can get it off my chest, then it will be okay."

If whatever we do leaves some imprint on our mind, then those imprints would coerce us into acting in a particular way, which in turn would leave more imprints. We have to somehow or other break that chain reaction.

Q: But it could be seen as exhausting karma.
A: Yes, in a way. That particular person wouldn't hang onto those things for a while, which is pretty healthy. Otherwise, that person might become more and more negative or more and more desperate, whatever is the case, and would develop a tremendous amount of unhealthy attitudes.

Q: If one doesn't actualise feelings, then it's possible the body can suffer. Hanging onto feelings or hanging onto traces and dispositions can corrupt the body or cause the actual tissue to deteriorate.
A: I think all those things are really signs for some kind of explanation of interactionism, that mind and body interact. Recently, some physiologists and neurophysiologists have also come up with that type of thing. They think that's how things really work, but some of the philosophers go too far. Some philosophers try to maintain their psychophysical identity totally and they turn materialist. In some ways, I think they're more preoccupied with that than neurophysiologists or physiologist.

Q: If you say there's no indifference, then we're always looking at things with some idea of a threat or a promise. Where does that sense of threat come from?
A: That type of feeling basically comes from the dualistic notion of *me* and *other* and, on top of that, wanting to nurture and nourish one's own egocentricity.

Q: How did the other schools that weren't Yogacara handle that primal hope and fear?
A: They would also go along with this explanation, except they would say that there is such a thing as neutral feeling. Sometimes, you're just there and are not accumulating either good karma or bad karma. To put it simply, you just sit there. But that state of mind comes from some good karma which you have accumulated in the past.

Q: But Yogacara would say you must accumulate some karma, no matter what you do.
A: Not in a state where you are not doing anything. Our whole conscious process is movement. It's always doing one thing or another. It's not really at rest, until we begin to work through the habitual process. If we are able to work through that, then we might be able to be in a state where we don't perform any mental act which would bring about wholesome or unwholesome results.

Q: How did the schools prior to Yogacara justify it when they said it's possible to have the neutral feeling?
A: What they would say is that positive feeling goes with passion. If you take pleasure in certain things, there would be some positive feeling involved. When you have aggression and want to push things away, you accumulate negative situations and, when you don't do anything, then you're not creating any karma, so that comes from ignorance. They would explain it by relying on the standard Buddhist notion of three poisons: passion, aggression and ignorance. But Yogacarins would say that, if you are passionate or aggressive, you are already ignorant anyway, so you don't have to be neutral to suffer from ignorance.

Q: Does that mean we have no possibility of seeing beyond that level of pleasure and pain until we attain enlightenment?
A: No, I think there are possibilities of having glimpses, in meditation and when we begin to reflect onto a situation properly. We can have glimpses of it, but we might not go beyond that type of experience completely.

Q: What keeps people going, keeps them meditating, if they only see this box around them? You get to a point where you don't even trust pleasurable feelings, because you know where they're coming from.
A: I think there is a possibility of trying to see some break in between those situations. That's what meditation is for, really.

In meditation, we might be able to see some kind of gap in thought processes. In a similar way, all the other activities would have some kind of gap somewhere.

We might be able have glimpses of certain breaks in our habitual patterns. We can't experience it properly, unless we have worked through it properly.

Q: What's the experience of that gap in terms of feeling?
A: There is experience, but still, it might be coloured by your emotions. That's another thing. Meditation would make it more and more possible for you to be able to work through that. That particular gap wouldn't be a neutral feeling as we understand it, either. Meditation is not supposed to numb you, where you can't either feel pain or pleasure. It's supposed to lead you beyond feeling all the three types of feelings, in some sense. The third one is related to the other two, anyway. There is possibility for the gap that you might experience in meditation being something that's beyond what we might experience in ordinary circumstances.

Q: All these experiences which we are talking about - actualisation of the vasanas and the feeling experience at the time - are all outflowings. How do you practice non-outflowing in meditation?
A: That's what we normally try to do. You have done Theravadin meditation, so they told you, "Whatever thought comes up, say it's just a thought". You try to not see it with any kind of overtone. That's being non-judgemental. What they are saying is that, if you have an aggressive thought in meditation, you don't have to jump up and wash your mouth, because now you have discovered that you are not a proper vessel for meditation. You just see it as a thought. Meditative techniques in all Buddhist traditions are geared towards that.

Q: What constitutes karma?
A: Samskaras, habitual patterns.

Q: How do you make karma?
A: According to Yogacara, because the vasanas, the traces and dispositions, are retained in the substratum, when the appropriate circumstance arises, the traces and dispositions get stimulated and then actualised. They get actualised in action.

Q: But that is not making karma, that is the exhaustion of karma. How do you make karma?
A: But it's a vicious circle. The more you act and actualise your vasanas, then the more traces and dispositions are left behind, because of that act.

Q: But when the vasana gets actualised, can you practice non-outflowing and not make karma at that point in time?
A: You are able to do that in meditation.

Q: But you are not going to live twenty-four hours in meditation. You are going to live in day-to-day life. In meditation, you can realise many things, because the circumstances are conducive. But outside that, you haven't got a chance.
A: I think it comes from meditation. You try to be mindful and aware in all daily situations as well, before you act instinctively. You just see why you are

responding in certain ways. Otherwise, you get more and more mired in habitual situations.

Sometimes, we think we know certain things . We intuit certain situations and we might be correct, but sometimes habitual process becomes so ingrained in us that we think we are intuiting something but we act instinctively, because we have become so proficient in the habitual way of responding, rather than acting intuitively.

Q: I've always understood that you make karma with your intention and that's why it's very important to guard or know your intention when you are responding to a situation. Am I right in assuming that?
A: Yes. Conception is also normally coloured by feelings, either wholesome or unwholesome. So, whenever we intend upon something, there is always a feeling-tone involved. But it doesn't necessarily have to be so. If you get enlightened, you would direct your intention to certain things, but that wouldn't be coloured by your subjective feelings. That doesn't mean you become insensitive.

Q: I had a strong feeling that karma means motivation and intention. That's what really starts off the vicious cycle of karma.
A: But intention doesn't necessarily have to be present all the time to be able to create karma. We create karma in other ways, too. We don't necessarily premeditate anything, when we do a lot of things. But premeditated actions are even more disastrous.

Jurisprudence, the law, operates on a similar principle. Sometimes you do certain things without intention and you still get prosecuted. But if you do something with intention, then you are going to really get it.

It's a similar kind of thing. Karma is heavier, if something is done with motivation.

Q: I always felt there is nothing like unintentional karma. Because everything arises through the mind, even at a subtle level, intention must exist.
A: I think it depends upon how we define intention. If we mean premeditated, then it doesn't have to be like that. But traces and dispositions would coerce us in an unconscious way. There is some kind of intention involved on an unconscious level, but it's really hard to define properly.

Psychoanalysts say that things we do unconsciously are actually decisions we have made, unconsciously. So, I think it really depends.

But if we try to define it properly here, when Buddhists talk about intention, it normally means premeditated act. So, yes, we do things without intention and they bring about certain results, too, but they are not as heavy.

That's another thing. As far as Buddhists are concerned, there is no pre established rule where you do something and you are going to get punished for it. The degree of the prosecution depends upon your act, but the prosecution is not meted out by anyone. It's your own making.

Q: It seems that most karma is created out of circumstances and lack of awareness.

A: Generally, I think most of the time it is, yes.

The Five Skandhas: In Detail

We are going to have a further elaboration on the five skandhas, the five psychophysical constitutive principles, so that we could understand them properly. I've been trying to follow the text as it is presented, and some repetition is involved here.

The first skandha is form. Form is called *gzugs* in Tibetan. Gzugs, in the Yogacara system, includes almost everything. It is not just physical sensory presentations, but also ideal presentations. If you experience a hallucination due to drugs or you happen to be in a desert and see a mirage, those things might be regarded as something external or as something mental. But, as far as Yogacara goes, that is also form, because it is experienced by mind. Whether a particular sensory presentation is mind-dependent or independent of the percipient mind is totally secondary. Whatever the mind experiences is regarded as form. It does not matter whether the sensory perception is veridical or nonveridical, mistaken or not mistaken. As long as it is presented to you, then it is regarded as a form, the first skandha. This seems to be a peculiarly Yogacarin notion.

Feeling, the second skandha, which is called *tsorwa* in Tibetan, is regarded as one of the most important psychophysical constituent principles. It is said that feeling-tone permeates all our sensory perceptions, not only our ordinary mental processes. As soon as we perceive something through any of the sensory media, there is already a feeling-tone involved. There is no sensory perception which is free from feeling overtones.

It's quite usual to regard sensory perceptions as something passive and mental processes as something active. Certain objects stimulate your sense organ and then your mind responds to that in an active way. The object operates on you. It stimulates your senses.

According to Yogacara, sensory perceptions are not passive, but active, in the sense that, as soon as we perceive something, there is some feeling overtone involved in that experience. Due to the substratum of awareness, our experiences accumulate. People say, "Once bitten, twice shy". If you have had some experience in the past, then, as soon as you perceive that you are back in that particular situation, even if you don't exercise any intellectual power, still, there is some feeling-tone involved. You might feel nauseated or you might feel fear. There is an immediate reaction, which might be instinctive, but nevertheless, there is some feeling-tone associated with that whole situation.

The Yogacara system divides feeling, the second skandha or psychophysical principle, into two types.

The first type is mundane feeling involved in ordinary situations, which is called *feeling-tone with mark*, or *feeling-tone with referent*. There is some reference point. That feeling-tone is associated with all kinds of emotional instabilities.

Then, there is the feeling-tone of advanced practitioners. They experience certain things, but the feeling-tone involved is not associated with any kind of embellishment, as far as their psychological makeup is concerned.

So, there is feeling-tone with sign and feeling-tone without sign.

Feeling-tone with sign means having some kind of strong, obsessive concern. It is the dualistic situation of you having a feeling and then getting obsessively concerned with what you are feeling about. What you are feeling about is the objective aspect and the feeling that you have is the subjective aspect. With that kind of obsessive concern, there is some referent. With the meditator's feeling-tones, there is less demarcation between the feeling itself and what the meditator is feeling about.

The first type of feeling-tone is involved with *atmabhava*, which is a kind of egocentricity. In Tibetan, it's called *bdag-zin*. The latter type, the meditator's feeling-tone, is free from that. So, that seems to be the distinction.

What's suggested here is that the five skandhas are not to be regarded as bad or as something that need to be dismissed, but as you begin to progress, they become properly managed. When Buddhists say that "there is no soul, only five skandhas", you might think that if all there is is that situation of five skandhas, then they need to be dismissed.

The third skandha is perception. In Tibetan, perception is called *'dushes*. It has the function of discriminating the sense perceptions, taking certain information in and leaving certain information out. Some kind of editing process begins to take place.

This aspect of mental activity is, in some sense, divided into mundane and supramundane levels. It is said that, through meditation, the more we discover about our own basic psychological tendencies, the more we will be able to make a proper assessment of perception. On the mundane level, it is just making a proper judgment about a particular situation, but on the supramundane or spiritual level it means being aware of what is unwholesome and what is unwholesome, as far as our psychological tendencies are concerned. That sort of proper judgment is performed through this particular mental activity.

The fourth skandha is known as conception, which is called *'dubyed* in Tibetan.

I've thought about this and think that *conception* may not be such a good translation, because the explanation which is offered is that conception has the function of directing our mind to a particular object. It also has the ability to stimulate or provoke our traces and dispositions, so they begin to compel or propel us to act. Maybe *drive*, or something of that sort, is a better choice of word.

It is said that conception or drive is a necessary condition for all the other skandhas to be able to exist. The way the others can operate and get actualised is through the fourth one, which propels the others to direct themselves to a particular project.

Drive can also be distinguished between the mundane and supramundane levels. On the mundane level, it is drive that propels us to accumulate bad karma and engage in all kinds of activities which are harmful. But, on the supramundane level, it could become the impetus to be able to practice and advance on the path. It is not that, on the mundane level, drive or conception is present and on the supramundane it is absent, but it continues in a different form.

Before we conclude this, it should be mentioned that feeling-tone acts as the necessary condition for us to indulge in sensuality, while perception acts as the necessary condition for us to be able to engage in wrong views, to engage in all kinds of philosophical views and most mistaken intellectual activities.

So, that seems to be the functions of the different skandhas.

As we go along, we'll be referring to this. So, if you have some general understanding of it, you'll be able to keep track of what's going on.

We can discuss the fifth skandha in connection with mental events, because it involves both the mind as well as the objective side of the sense fields.

If you have any questions, you are welcome.

Q: Is the mundane level feeling-tone just some sort of editing process?
A: No. Feeling-tone doesn't involve any editing process. If you get an electric shock, you don't edit it. You happen to be in that situation and you get a buzz. The editing process takes place on the third level, which is perception.

You could be in a noisy situation. You select certain sounds and leave out other sounds. In your visual field, there are all kinds of things, but you can look at one object and leave out the rest. You can direct your attention to a particular smell and not smell the rest. That sort of thing takes place on all kinds of levels.

Feeling-tone is very immediate, which means that, as far as your experience goes, there is no interpretation involved. On the perceptual level, there could be some kind of interpretation. What you experience might not be what you actually experience, in a strict sense. There could be some subjective interpretation involved.

Q: Does the substratum of awareness give rise to feeling-tone? The immediate connection with, say, a visual object triggers some psychological association, which gives rise to a feeling-tone?
A: Yes, that's right. You might experience a phobia. The fear that you have might be due to certain past associations. All these things, actually, are associated with the substratum. Whatever we experience is dependent upon the substratum, including the fourth skandha, which is the ground or the possibility for all the others to operate.

Q: Would an advanced practitioner still have a substratum of awareness that would be affecting one's feeling-tone?
A: I think there would be degrees of that. You are less and less subject to the influence of the substratum as you progress. Still, you could have feeling-tones without having the substratum. There are two levels of feeling-tones. When it is said that you work through all your emotional instabilities and then attain enlightenment, people think you get really numb, because you do not experience emotions. There could be feeling-tones involved, but they do not produce impacts on your mind whereby traces and dispositions are left behind to be realised or actualised at some later time.

Q: How can they still be subjective feeling-tones?
A: They're subjective from the point of view that there is a subject to experience them, but it is not egocentric. There's a distinction between the two. As long as there is a feeling, that feeling must belong to a particular individual. You cannot have a feeling without an individual. But normally, there is always some over-

obsessive concern with the whole situation. When that is worked through, then the feeling-tone is still owned by a particular individual, but that individual is not obsessed with it.

Q: We have such preconceptions of ordinary things. If something that you are familiar with gave you a real shock, how would you relate to that?
A: I think you can either discover a completely new dimension of your consciousness or you could lose your ground completely. Because there is no reference, as far as your past experiences are concerned, it might produce paranoia, in which case you freak out. But, at the same time, there is the possibility of exploring another dimension of your consciousness.

Q: Would the sudden shock of not having any ground be similar to the death experience?
A: In some sense, yes. It really depends upon the situation and who is experiencing it. For instance, if a really hard headed physicist happened to suddenly acquire telepathic powers, he might think he was going mad. But for another person, it might be a kind of opportunity. Not that mental powers are encouraged in Buddhist practice.

Q: As you progress in meditation and the situation is less dualistic, is there less perception or less editing?
A: They work together, all the time, in ordinary circumstances. In some ways, they work on a higher level, too. On a higher level, there is still discriminating ability, but the discriminating is not getting things mixed up, not so much siding with a certain situation and ignoring others, which happens in ordinary circumstances. You still have the ability to distinguish one thing from another. You use judgment, but that judgment is to the point. It's not charged with emotional biases, in some sense. So, you are able to make a proper judgment of the situation.

Q: With a more non-dualistic state, you perceive a situation as you did before, but you act or experience it differently?
A: Yes, I think so. That type of perception can be developed into what is known as *prajna*, which means *discriminating awareness*. There's still a tremendous ability to discriminate, but that discrimination is not the type of discrimination we are familiar with, such as racial discrimination or even the ordinary discrimination between a cup of tea and a cup of coffee. You are able to make a proper assessment of a situation without getting bogged down with your past experiences. The less you are influenced by past experiences, the more you are able to make a proper assessment of a situation.

Q: Does *dualistic* mean *separate*?
A: Yes. When Buddhists talk about non dualism, it does not mean that everything is one, that subject and object become one in the numerical sense. It does not mean oneness, that suddenly you discover that there is this gigantic whole that you happen to be part of. It is not a question of how things are, it is more a question of

how you view things. The less you view things in a non dualistic way, the more you are able to make a proper judgment, because you are freed from your own preconceptions. But that does not lead you into just becoming one, in a numerical sense. It is not like bringing two things together and making them into one object. To put it more technically, philosophers say it is epistemological. It deals with knowledge, rather than with things as they are, the way things exist. Which is an ontological question.

Q: Could you elaborate on that saying, "Once bitten, twice shy"? I thought you meant that once we have an experience which produces a feeling then, if that experience occurs again, the same feeling will....
A: Before that experience is repeated, you already have the feeling. The experience does not have to recur to have that feeling. You already feel it.

Q: I don't understand.
A: I think it's quite straightforward. If you were once tortured, the sight of certain instruments might reduce you to tears, but no one is banging you on the head. You experience it, you can actually experience it. The very confrontation with that situation brings out the whole feeling. So, in some sense, all our perceptions have feeling-tones, no matter what, because of the substratum. Whatever we experience is like that. It may not be as dramatic, but still, it always has something to do with our past associations. There is some kind of feeling-tone involved with any perception that we have about the world or about other people. In some ways, there are no new feelings. Feelings are always recurrent, in some sense.

Q: If it is a negative or unwholesome feeling, a feeling that can do damage to oneself, is it possible to prevent that feeling from occurring?
A: Yes. That is what we will be discussing. As it is set out, the mental events are related to how we act in different situations in an unwholesome way and defeat the whole purpose of doing certain things, or how we could act and make a proper assessment of a situation and develop psychologically and spiritually in a wholesome way. So far, we have just been trying to describe how the mind operates as far as Yogacara philosophy is concerned. We have not really discussed what neuroses are there and how we act neurotically or how we act in a healthy way in certain situations. Those things are associated with certain mental events. We need to discuss that in conjunction with the Buddhist path and then go on to how the mind is transformed when you attain enlightenment.

Q: Is the order that you've given the five skandhas an indication of a sequence of events that occurs? Do we experience form before feeling, feeling before perception, perception before conception, or can they occur in a different order?
A: They're simultaneous, in some sense. There is no real chronological order, as such. In some ways, the last one would be first, if you wanted to look at the whole thing chronologically, because in anything that we experience, there is some kind of directedness to our conscious procedure. If we feel something, there is a feeling directed towards a particular object. If we perceive something, there is perceiving

directed towards something. It happens on all levels. On the sensory level, there is the act of seeing and then there is the seen. There is always the conscious act and the object that is acted upon. The conscious act is always directed towards something. It's a necessary condition for all the other skandhas to be possible, except for form, because form is not mental, so it cannot direct itself towards anything. But apart from that, whenever there is conscious act involved, there is some kind of directedness. The fourth skandha is the necessary condition for all the others to exist and, in some ways, it precedes all the others. Whatever you experience is always that thing which manifests immediately, so the fourth skandha is a necessary condition.

Q: I'm still not very clear on what that fourth skandha really is.
A: All it is, is that you are able to direct your consciousness onto your own conscious procedure.

If you are thinking something, you can direct your thought to the thought. You can do that. So, there is the thought that is thinking about the thought, there is the thought that is thought about and then there is the thinking procedure that is taking place.

This takes place with outside situations as well. There's always a split between the act and the object acted upon. This is the function of the fourth skandha.

In other words, any conscious process has something to be conscious of. You cannot be conscious and not be conscious of something. That is one aspect. The other aspect is that it does not just direct our minds to a particular object, it also prepares us to act upon situations. We just don't sit back. There is some kind of need to act, in some sense, in certain situations. Without any control over the whole situation, we just act quite instinctively. That sort of situation takes place because of the fourth skandha, as well.

So, there are two types of operation of the fourth skandha, in some sense. The first is just the ordinary situation where we are aware of certain things. There is the act of awareness and then something to be aware of, or there is the act of feeling and something to be felt about. But then, when you have a particular feeling-tone, you are compelled to act in a certain way, through the guidance of your feeling-tone or because of your perception, whatever. That act would be performed through the impetus of the fourth skandha. In that, it is more like a drive than conception.

Q: Is there any reason why drive chooses to act upon one thing rather than another?
A: You might think you are acting instinctively, but it would not necessarily be instinctive. It would be associated with traces and dispositions. But when you begin to develop spiritually, there could be intelligent drive as well. You might act in a particular way, but that would not be drive in the ordinary sense. You are not driven by your whims. It is an intelligent way of acting. In that case, it is not necessarily drive, but there is still the need to act properly, on the spot.

Q: When you purify intentionality, is that what they call non-volitional activity of someone who is enlightened?

A: Yes. Buddhas act, too, according to situations. It is not as if Buddhas do not make assessments of certain situations and then act accordingly. They do. The need to act would be somewhat different from the way ordinary people act, which is due to the influence of traces and dispositions. The fourth skandha provides the impetus for people to act that way. Enlightened beings would act, but it would be more spontaneous. At the same time, there is the need to act. An enlightened being does not just perform an act arbitrarily. An enlightened being would act in a certain way in a certain situation and not act that way in other situations. There is some difference.

Q: If an enlightened being does not have any traces and dispositions, then where is the grounding for one to act correctly?
A: Due to the sharpening of perception, you begin to develop prajna. The sharpening of discriminating awareness takes place, whereby you are able to make a proper judgment that is not for or against anything. Normally, when we make a judgment, we evaluate the situation and make a decision that involves for and against. When an enlightened being makes a judgment, it is not for or against. It is because the situation demands it and that is done.

Q: Traces and dispositions cause us to act in neurotic ways. Then, when those traces and dispositions are gone, there is the presence of prajna which causes any action to be right?
A: That's right. So, we have right intentionality or drive and we have right perception. The whole thing becomes highly sophisticated.

Q: Are we trying to get rid of our traces and dispositions and put in prajna?
A: That's right. The only thing that's changing are the traces and dispositions, but the medium is the same, in many ways. The medium is the five skandhas. The five skandhas really don't change. The reason our perception, conception and so on are deluded, is because of the traces and dispositions. So, what is changing is the traces and dispositions, not the medium. The medium is the same, as much as you still use your eyes to see and your nose to smell. It is a similar situation with the five skandhas. You would still have five skandhas. The medium is the same, but the contents are different.

Q: Are you saying that a Buddha has five skandhas?
A: Yes. Why not?

Q: If there is an increase in a person's ability to act correctly, does that mean it's irrelevant how another experiences that action?
A: No, it's not irrelevant. That's the thing. A person is able to make a judgment that is proper for the other person, as well. Sometimes the other person might not see it as being proper or wholesome, but, in time, that person might discover that what has been done has been really good in the long run.

Q: In this set of ideas, is there any sense of the idea of responsibility?

A: Responsibility is there, but not responsibility as a burden of some sort. Normally, when we feel responsible, we feel completely bogged down. The more responsibility we feel, the more bogged down we get.

Enlightened beings might feel responsible. They might act in certain situations, but they would not get bogged down by their own responsibilities, because it is not a decision for or against. It is making a proper assessment of the immediate situation, rather than elaborating on the whole thing and creating a different picture altogether. Which we normally do. The act might be the same as any other person, but the intention would be different.

If there is going to be a nuclear holocaust and someone has the ability to stop it, there might not be any difference between the way an ordinary person does it and the way an enlightened being does it, but the intention would be quite different. It is the mental attitude that is involved that makes the difference. It's not so much how the act is carried out. How the act is carried out might be the same, as much as enlightened beings would eat food and do that sort of thing.

Q: Isn't the underlying principle of an enlightened being's action to benefit all sentient beings?
A: That's right. But an enlightened person might not be too concerned with that, either. You might not necessarily feel obsessed with helping others. Enlightened beings are really supposed to act as a situation arises.

If a bodhisattva - someone who has adopted the attitude of the Mahayana - tries to practice, then maybe that person would make some mistakes. Something that you think is beneficial for others might turn out to be not beneficial at all. But as you begin to develop, then whatever you engage in becomes more and more precise and accurate.

Q: From a Yogacara point of view, you could say that the Buddha has five skandhas. What about from a Madhyamika point of view?
A: Yogacara, Madhyamika and most of the Mahayana schools would say that Buddha does not have five skandhas in the ordinary sense, because, as I've said, the perceptual skills get perfected, whereby they no longer function the way they ordinarily function. But still, there are five psychophysical constituents involved.

Early Buddhists believed that buddhas have psychophysical constituents. Not only that, but they believed that psychophysical constituents cannot be purified. Even the buddhas suffer from them. They use the image of the Buddha's brother firing a cannon and blowing a piece of toe off the Buddha. They say that he was subject to that sort of thing and he was suffering from the psychophysical constituents.

As far as Mahayana is concerned, he has five skandhas, but his management of that whole thing is totally different from ordinary people. That's all. But that does not necessarily mean that Buddha is immutable, that his body is so solid that nothing can blow it up, or anything of the sort.

Q: You get very contradictory stories about the Buddha. There was someone who was running after the Buddha, trying to kill him, but the more he ran, the more the

Buddha kept the same distance. Yet the same Buddha had to suffer through dysentery.

A: Early Buddhists depict Buddha as being an ordinary human being. He had mental perfection, but he was a human being subject to certain situations. He had more skills than others, but that did not exclude him from being a human being.

In Buddhist tradition, there are certain parables - jataka stories -written for lay people. Lay people want to believe in all kinds of stories. That is the way they practice. But then, sometimes some psychological interpretation is given to those stories. This especially happens in the Mahayana tradition. They wouldn't necessarily be historical facts. I think early Buddhists would take them as being more literal than later Buddhists would.

Later Buddhists tend to give a psychological interpretation to almost everything that takes place about certain individuals. Historically, it is devastating, but individually, I think it's very good, because you begin to really understand what the whole thing is all about.

So, it serves two purposes. Lay people, who do not want to inquire further into the doctrinal side, can just have these fantastic stories about the buddhas and bodhisattvas and they can practice that way, and interested people could learn further and see how all those things can be interpreted.

For example, just before the Buddha attained enlightenment, demons sent their daughters to tempt Buddha. Psychologically interpreted, that means the Buddha overcame passion and aggression simultaneously on the spot, completely. All these internal neurotic tendencies were completely cut through and, ever since then, he was free from that. It doesn't literally mean that all these emanations rolled up.

The Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava is a really good example of how you could interpret a life story in two ways, one for lay people and one for practitioners.

Q: If you say to yourself, "If I veer from this path, if I go wrong, put me back on", then I believe that situations would arise by themselves and the person is put back on the path.

A: I think that's possible. If you really commit yourself to practice, then it is an ongoing pursuit. Even when you think you have given yourself a break, you really haven't. The break itself becomes part of the process. You begin to realise that the break wasn't a break at all. It is an error and correction procedure that goes on all the time. Once you have committed yourself, then that's it. There is no stopping, in some sense.

Q: Is it possible to become enlightened or to seek enlightenment without identifying yourself as a Buddhist or following a particular path?

A: I think so. If you want to transcend being Buddhist, first you need to become a Buddhist. Seriously. That's really a prerequisite of any spiritual practice, in some ways. Once you get to the other side, it doesn't matter. You don't have to call yourself Buddhist or anything of the sort. But to be able to get there, you have to be Buddhist.

Q: Is it possible to be Buddhist without knowing that's what you are?

A: I think that's possible. But in many cases, people come to the realisation that they are Buddhist and that is why they become Buddhist.

In Buddhist terms, for you to be able to discover that, there have to be traces and dispositions left behind which would create that particular situation. You might remain as a Buddhist without realising it, but then, at some stage, that would be awakened. Which I think is important.

To be a real Buddhist, you need to engage in certain practices and so on. You can't just say, "I'm a harmless human being and think I'm Buddhist". That's okay, but then you begin to discover what is happening and you begin to wonder further. It's a continuous procedure on that level, too. The journey might have taken place long before you called yourself a Buddhist, so becoming Buddhist, engaging in Buddhist practice, would be further confirmation of that. The journey really would have started before you called yourself a Buddhist.

Q: There are those who follow the Christian path or the Hindu path. It's possible to become enlightened through that process, as well. Is it possible to not follow any particular system or scheme, but just be lucky?
A: There is no luck. You are already unlucky, in some sense. For whoever thinks that way, it really becomes a problem at some stage.

You do not have to be dogmatic about your practice, thinking that what you are doing is the answer to everything and what other people do is wrong. But a certain amount of commitment to a particular practice is necessary, if you really want to progress spiritually.

It does not matter what you are committing yourself to. Otherwise, you do not make any advancement. You might make it, but you are doing it the hard way. If a person thinks that way, that is not really taking any step towards anything.

In each tradition, there are certain intricacies and certain practices involved. It is not just a matter of calling yourself something or other. It is really a question of yourself. It is not signing your name on the dotted line and becoming a club member. That is just external. As far as the spiritual side goes, it is a matter of life and death, in some sense. So, it is really personal, on that level.

Q: When we talk about commitment to the path, you know when you arrive at that stage and, if that's what you want to do, that's fine. But to do that with the aim or the goal of enlightenment I find absurd. To seek nirvana is to lose nirvana. From my experience, it feels wrong to have any goal in mind, except what is being transcended in the present. You just feel that continuity, if you like. You've got what you want to cut through in mind, but not to achieve as an end. It's not a question of when the train's going to arrive, but just the journey.
A: Once the train has left the station, then obviously it's going to arrive somewhere. I think that's right. I greatly approve of it. That's my own approach, any way.

Thinking about a destination doesn't get you there. You need to embark on the vehicle and, once you've embarked on the vehicle, then you have already left for your destination. Thinking about the destination might only create a problem. You might want to get off at the next station, which could completely delay your journey.

Q: If you don't have an idea of the destination, there's no incentive for you to correct whatever wrongs you are doing on the journey. There is no incentive to even continue the journey.
A: The incentive is just to embark on the path. Once you have embarked on the path, then that's it. You have already done the research. You have looked at the map and know where a certain vehicle leaves from what station and goes to what destination. You have to do the research and you have to have enough money to take the journey. Once you've done that, then you get into the vehicle and that is it. If you think too much about the destination, about what it's going to be like and whether you'll be able to support yourself once you get there, you could decide to get off and wander around somewhere. You might finally end up going back, but you have wasted so much time. That seems to be the whole procedure.

That is the whole Buddhist path: the Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana. On the Hinayana level, you do research, you think about the goal, you make the proper arrangements and so on. On the Mahayana level, the journey is already taking place and you no longer need to concern yourself too much about the destination.

Q: What about ongoing doubt? You're saying, trust in your training, trust in the vehicle, what you are on is okay.
A: That's right. But occasional doubts are fine. They might keep you busy while you are there. They're like occasional sneezes. In some ways, that produces some sparks on the journey, which is not regarded as anything bad. But if you are too preoccupied with a goal situation, then it could become a self-defeating process.

Mind and Mental Events: Conditions of Compatibility

We are going to discuss how sensory perceptions are related to the mind and mental events, and also try to explore how the mind and mental events are related to each other, which seems to be an important issue here.

The fundamental distinction made in Yogacara philosophy between the mind and mental events is that the mind apprehends an object as a whole, whereas mental events apprehend an object in its particulars.

If we perceive a table, then the perception of the table itself would be related to the mind, whereas the particular characteristics of that table would be the object of perception for the mental events. First, we have an immediate perception of the table. After that, we have certain feeling-tones, certain judgments, involved with that particular perception. Those things are related to the mental events. The immediate perception is the only thing related to the mind. That seems to be the major distinction between the mind and the mental events.

We cannot say that the mind and the mental events are totally identical or that each of them maintains its own individuality, but they are closely related to each other. There are bonding factors involved in that situation. These binding factors are known as conditions of compatibility. In Tibetan, it is called *ntsung ldan.*

The first factor is known as *compatibility of the sensory organ.*

If the mind is involved with the visual organ, then the mental events - the feelings, perception, whatever they may be - would also be involved with the visual organ. A compatibility exists between the mind and the mental events.

We'll be going into great detail about the mental events later on, so at this particular stage we don't have to bother about what these mental events are.

The second factor is known as *compatibility of the sensory object.*

If the mind is directing its attention to a particular object, then the mental events would also be connected with that object. If the mind has directed its attention to a table, then the mental events would not be about something else. They would be involved with that perception.

The third factor is known as *compatibility of appearance.*

If the mind perceives a particular object as looking blue, then all the mental events - the feelings, perceptions and so on - would receive similar information. The difference between the first factor and this one is that appearance can sometimes be delusive, but with the object you cannot be mistaken. You could think that something looks blue, but it might not be blue at all. On further reflection, that perception could be checked and you might find out it is yellow. When you have that kind of delusory or illusory perception, still, the mind and the mental events have received the same kind of information. But if you see a table, it is a table. You cannot be mistaken about that. That seems to be the distinction.

The fourth one is *compatibility of time.*

Whenever there is some primary mental act, there is also a mental event associated with that act, so they take place at the same time. They are com-present, as they say. They are present at the same time.

The fifth factor is known as *compatibility of substance*, which means that the mind and the mental events are constituted or made up of the same stuff. There is no distinction between the two on the substantial level.

These are the five conditions of compatibility which link or bridge the gap between mind and mental events. We need to investigate and explore this further.

For instance, when it is said that *the mind apprehends the object in its entirety*, what does it mean? And what does it mean when it is said that *the mental events apprehend only the parts*?

It is said that we cannot say that the mind only apprehends the whole and the mental event only apprehends the parts. There must be some kind of overlap between the two. Otherwise, if there is no overlap between the two, there would be no communication between the mind and mental events and we would have a fragmented perception of the world. So, there must be some kind of overlap.

This distinction is made, due to the primary function of each of these mental processes. The mind and mental events apprehend the same object, but they have different functions. Because they apprehend the same object, there would be some relationship between the two, some kind of overlapping situation. Apprehension of the mind is totally non conceptual. It is immediate perception of the object. Mental events are conceptual. All feeling-tones and judgmental processes are related to mental events, rather than to the primary mental act of the perception.

The situation of compatibility of time should also be clarified.

It is said that we should not take this literally, that mind and mental events are both present at the same time and in the same space. No two things can occupy the same space and time. There has to be some logical or chronological order. They cannot be present at the same time, in a strict sense. If they are copresent, in the literal sense, then there would be no chronological or logical order, which would violate causal law.

The mind has to operate on the mental event and the mental events have to react to the mind, so there has to be some interaction between the two. Interaction naturally implies causal relationship and causality cannot exist unless there is temporal sequence. Cause has to precede effect and effect has to follow cause.

The reason it is said that the mind and mental events are copresent is because they are copresent in the ordinary sense of the word, rather than in a strict logical sense. It does not mean that the mind and mental events occupy the same point of space and time.

The Buddhist master who wrote the text that I've been relying on for the teachings says that some Buddhist masters have maintained that copresence of mind and mental event means they are literally simultaneous, but all kinds of difficulties come along if we believe that. Other Buddhist masters used such examples as the flame of a lamp and its shadow, or two sticks leaning on each other simultaneously, and say that one is not precedent to the other, but those kind of examples are not quite relevant. Two sticks do not occupy the same space, they occupy different spaces, and a lamp first has to be lit and then its shadow comes along, so there is a temporal sequence. So, such examples are very shallow on that level.

When the text talks about compresence of mind and mental events, it does not mean that there is no causal relationship. It just means that the interval between

cause and effect is so ignorable, in some ways, that they are almost compresent. Bùt we should not get carried away by that and say they are literally compresent.

When the mind and mental events are said to be made out of the same substance, again, we have to make some provision for this. It does not literally mean that the mind and the mental events are made out of the same substance. But, there is a homogeneous relationship between the mind and the mental events. There is resemblance between the two, but they are not literally identical. The mind and the mental events cannot be identified as being the same entity.

If we identify the mind and the mental events, then we run into all kinds of difficulties. By and large, Buddhists have rejected what is known as the cause and effect identity theory, which means that cause and effect are seen in different ways, but from an objective point of view are the same thing. The only continuity that exists between cause and effect is a homogeneous relationship. They are not literally made of the same substance and there is no real identity.

Like milk and cream, there is a homogeneous relationship, but we cannot say that milk is cream. In a similar way, there is a homogenous relationship between the mind and the mental effects, but the mind is not the mental events.

It should be noted that these discussions came up as a reaction against some of the Hindu schools. For instance, a Hindu school known as Samkhya identified cause and effect, but Buddhists rejected that notion.

So, in terms of our perception of the world, five conditions of compatibility exist between the mind and the mental events. It is said that, as far as our perception of the world is concerned, they are the necessary ground for being able to have any kind of perception.

I think the text makes it clear that we cannot maintain these conditions in a pedantic way. Some provisions have to be made for exceptional cases and so on. Generally, the mind and the mental events are somewhat distinct, but they also interact and are intimately related with each other. That intimate relationship forms a complex system, if you like, in terms of understanding the world.

As we go along, we will be discussing what the mental events are, because they are more related to spiritual and ethical issues rather than to psychological and philosophical issues .

That concludes the technical aspect of the teachings.

If you would like to have a discussion, you are welcome.

Q: I'm lost. The last thing we did was the five skandhas. Is this is the fifth one?
A: I think you could say that, yes. The fifth one is the mind, and the mental events are connected with that.

Q: Is compatibility of appearance like colour?
A: That's right. Colour, shape and so on.

Q: The fourth factor talked about time, but the examples you gave related mainly to space.
A: Time and space are closely related. Time is the more important factor, in some sense, but space is also involved. If this bell is present here, now, then it occupies a particular space as well. If it is not present here, now, which is a temporary

situation, then the space would also be vacant. It is a time-space situation. But there has to be some kind of temporary order, temporary sequence. That's what Buddhists say. Otherwise, we violate causal law.

What is causality? Cause has to precede effect. You have a primary mental act of some sort and that would bring about certain modifications of the mental events, or the mental events would act upon the primary mind and bring about certain modifications and so on. The interaction between the two exists due to causal relationships. But if they're literally compresent, then that violates the causal relationship completely. Then there is no reason why any change should take place, because there is nothing that acts upon the other.

Q: If the mind is immediate perception, is it samsaric or non-samsaric?
A: It provides the ground for both samsara and nirvana. It is a necessary condition for enlightened beings, as well as for deluded beings. Mind is quite indeterminate on that level. But mind, here, really means the eight levels of consciousness.

Q: Deluded beings have mental events, but an enlightened being would just have mind?
A: We have to be quite careful, because there is some overlap between the two. We cannot make such sharp distinctions. We could generalise and say that enlightened beings have fewer mental events. Even healthy mental events turn out to be emotive, in an ultimate sense. There are emotional overtones involved with those mental events and they turn out to be, in some ways, psychologically inhibitive.

Q: What's the Tibetan for mind, here?
A: *Sems*.
Q: And mental events?
A: *Sems-byung*. Sems, in this particular context, covers the eight levels of consciousness.

Q: If I'm looking at a particular object, why would my mental events necessarily be directed to that object? Why couldn't I daydream or think about something else?
A: If you daydream, you might not have a physical object, but you have still responded in some kind of emotional way. You might feel good about it or you might feel uneasy about it. All kinds of mental events would be associated with that daydreaming process. Mind itself does not create any situation of that sort. It is due to the mental events that you have all these conceptual processes taking place in association with any kind of experience.

Q: Is the daydream the object?
A: Yes. The object could be ideal or real. Ideal in terms of it all being in the mind, or it being a real physical situation.

Q: But I could have different mental events about the same object. The ocean might make me feel depressed one day and happy the next.

A: That's okay, because in any given situation, the mind and the mental events are closely interrelated. They present the same thing to you. That's what it all means, that is the compatibility of the two. Mind is indeterminate, to a certain degree. It doesn't interpret the situation as much as the mental events would, but the mind is the necessary condition. The mind occupies the primary position and the mental events occupy a subsidiary place in the whole mental process. But still, in any given situation, the mind and mental events are compatible, because otherwise you would have a fragmented perception of the world.

Q: So a feeling-tone would only arise because you are looking at some object?
A: Yes. Otherwise you would receive certain information due to your primary mental act and other information through mental events, but that does not happen. Whenever you have a particular experience, there is some uniformity between the two. And most of the time, we don't really notice it very much.

Q: So there has to be some cause for every mental event we experience?
A: Mind and mental events cause each other. The causal relationship between the two exists continuously. That's what it means when it is said that we cannot literally say that both mind and mental events come into being simultaneously, in a literal sense of the word, because otherwise the mind wouldn't be able to create certain situations or act on the mental events, or the mental events wouldn't be able to invoke certain situations. That causal relationship exists, because in any mental act there is some time lag or interval between the two. It would just be a matter of a fraction of a second. We don't notice it. We might just be immediately aware of a colour and a shape. We don't know what it is, then we begin to realise what it is and, on further reflection, we can verify our experience through some kind of experiment.

If we use the classic Buddhist example of a rope and snake, first you just see this elongated thing with some colour patches lying on the road and then you think it's a snake. But if you perform some further reflection, you might be able to verify it and say, "This is not a snake at all, this is a rope." All those mental events take place as a result of you having an immediate experience of that type of physical sensation.

Q: Is there an awareness of the mental event?
A: There could be awareness of mental events. That's highly possible.

Q: So when there are no mental events, there is just awareness?
A: There are some mental events taking place in any kind of situation.

Q: There's no time when there is just mind without mental events?
A: No. That's what we mean by saying that mind and mental events are closely related with each other. Whatever we experience would be associated with a certain type of mental event, whether it's healthy or unhealthy or neutral.

Q: Is the thing that creates that unhealthy or healthy mental event the mind?
A: No, unhealthy situations exist due to certain mental events. Mental events actually create traces and dispositions. Mental events take place and leave certain impressions on the substratum of awareness, which in turn rise and create further mental events. So that whole process continues that way.

Q: What was the first compatibility, the compatibility of the sensory organ?
A: The compatibility of sensory organ really means that if your mind is involved with your visual organ, then the mental event would also be associated with that particular organ. Your mind wouldn't be involved with the visual organ and the mental event with the aural organ, and receive some contradictory information. There is compatibility, there is function in a uniform way.

Q: If I look at a chair and then direct my attention to a table, the mental event of the chair ceases. Does that mental event of the chair imprint itself on the substratum of awareness?
A: Yes.

Q: So what we experience is an accumulation. All mental events are reabsorbed by the substratum.
A: That's right. Mind and mental events are really temporary, momentary. Sometimes we visually experience something, and then aurally we experience something else almost simultaneously. There is some temporal order that we cannot detect in ordinary situations, but that sort of situation exists. Whatever experience we have leaves some impression behind on the substratum, which creates the necessary condition for us to be able to have further experiences of that sort in the future.

Q: Does that mean that subsequent mental events are coloured by previous ones? Every mental event that occurs is then an extra facet to a subsequent mental event?
A: Yes. Due to traces and dispositions, that becomes more and more a possible situation. If we have accumulated certain traces and dispositions, then we would continue to think and see certain things in that particular way, due to the influence of the traces and dispositions.

Q: If we can learn to discriminate between positive and negative mental events, then we can begin to sort out what traces and dispositions we absorb and what traces and dispositions we avoid?
A: That's right. Just being able to detect that mental events are taking place, being observant about those situations, would create some possibility of being able to avoid that type of thing.

That's a really important issue in the Buddhist context. Even if you study tantra, studying mind and mental events is really important, because most of the deities and so on are really a symbolic expression of our psychological makeup.

Sometimes the deities wear five skulls as a crown. Unless you know what the five skulls are, you just think the Tibetans must be totally out of their minds.

Maybe they produced all this weird art because they took mushrooms. It is said that those five skulls represent the five skandhas. It's not as simple as that, but putting it simply, they represent the five skandhas. Then the deities wear fifty-one human skulls as a rosary around their neck. The psychological implication is that the fifty-one skulls represent the fifty-one mental events.

These paintings are used as a method of transforming your mind and mental events through repeated performance of visualisation. You begin to purify your perception by constantly performing that kind of visualisation. What the whole practice really involves is being able to relate to healthy and unhealthy mental events, how they relate to us and how they actually operate. Normally, we choose to ignore those things. We might not even make a distinction between mind and mental events.

As far as I know, in the West this sort of distinction isn't really made. Normally, they tend to make three types of distinctions between mental acts: cognitive, conative and affective. Cognitive has to do with knowledge, conative, I think, is related to the will, and then affective has to do with emotions. But there is no detailed explanation about mental events, as far as I know.

For Buddhists, it's really important. You're constantly reflecting onto yourself, especially through meditation. So, you have to learn more and more about how your mind is operating.

Q: Would my particular sequence of mental events be coloured by previous mental events that have occurred in previous lives?
A: Oh, yes. Sure.

Q: So that sequence of mental events doesn't cease until you become fully realised.
A: That's right. As far as Buddhists are concerned, not all your problems would be related to your childhood traumas or to genetics. There would be also a question of previous life experiences. You cannot dispense with that kind of possibility, anyway.

Q: It seems that once you begin to understand what is really happening, then instead of just being subject to these mental events, you can begin to have some power over them, rather than the mental events having power over you.
A: That's right. Not in the egocentric role of having power, but in being able to relate to your own neuroses in an unneurotic way.

Q: If you are watching a movie, you are seeing and hearing it at the same time. Can you only have mental events about one of those things?
A: I don't know what experimental psychologists would say, but as far as Buddhists are concerned, you are able to direct your mind to one particular sensory perception at any given moment. It could be just the smallest fraction of a second and it switches over. That's why we think we really hear and see things simultaneously. In actual fact, we are only aware of one particular sensory perception at any given point in time.

Q: Could look at something, but concentrate on hearing and just be aware of seeing? You wouldn't form any concepts about what you were seeing, you would just be looking.
A: I think that takes place in ordinary situations. For instance, if you go to a place where there is a very stimulating sound, but visually there is nothing attractive, you could have been there for two hours and heard everything, but not have noticed anything. Someone could come up to you and say, "Did you see that?", and you might say, "See what?" That takes place all the time. It goes the other way, as well. You might get totally engrossed with your visual perception and not hear anything. It depends upon what interests you

But in ordinary circumstances, sense perceptions alternate every fraction of a second. So, there is some uniformity to the sensory perceptions that are presented to us, but in actual fact, they are discrete, they are fragmented. It's like a TV screen. You see a picture, but the picture projected on the screen really consists of dots. Our sensory perceptions are really discrete, but they're unified through our interpretation, through mental events.

Q: So directing your mind, the fourth skandha, creates that whole thing.
A: That's right. The fourth skandha drags your mind to a particular sensory object that really interests you, whatever it may be. That ability to direct your mind that way is the fourth skandha. That very ability. There's no fourth skandha apart from that. The act itself is the fourth skandha. The fourth skandha doesn't do that. The doing itself is the fourth skandha.

Q: What is Samkhya philosophy?
A: I mentioned that in connection with the notion of causal law.

Samkhya philosophy says that there is no distinction between cause and effect. For instance, there is no real distinction between a sprout and a seed. The sprout and the seed are identical.

Buddhists would reject that. You cannot have the effect present in the cause, because if the effect is already present in the cause, then it's not an effect. The very notion of effect comes from the fact that a cause produces something, an effect. It's manifesting as a result of some modification taking place in causal situations.

Samkhya philosophy says a lot. It's had a lot of influence on yoga, too. Yoga philosophy is very dependent upon Samkhya philosophy.

Q: I just happened to be reading the *Bhagavagita*, where Krishna is talking about the *atma*. He says atma is never born, so it cannot die, is immutable and imperishable, cannot be seen, cannot be understood. It's almost like saying it's empty.
A: There's really a big distinction. Samkhya philosophy is very much in keeping with Plato's philosophy that the body is something you should dispense with, whereas the soul is something sacred. The body reminds you of your kinship with the brute, as Western philosophers put it, with animals. As far as bodily function goes, there is no distinction between you and the animals. What makes a distinction between you and the animals is your soul.

But that kind of dualistic notion didn't exist with Buddhists, especially with the Mahayanists. We are always talking about non dualism, so we cannot say the soul is immutable, whereas the body is mutable and something that we can dispense with. There's no spiritual substance that is not mutable.

There are a lot of similarities between Hindu practices and Buddhist practices. From a practical point of view, there are a lot of similarities, especially in the *Patanjaliyoga Sutra*. When it comes to a description of meditation, there are many passages that are really similar to what the Buddhist would say, but when it comes to metaphysical questions it's very different.

Samkhya philosophy is dualistic. It believes in two irreducible substances, mind and matter, *purusa* and *prakti*, which constitute the universe.

Q: (Question unavailable)
A: All our neuroses and shortcomings are not exhausted, as much as seen for what they are, which I think is much more powerful than being able to eliminate them, which only might create room for further complications. If you eliminate something, it only creates further vacancies to be filled. But if you change a thing, then it could be seen as completely different material to work with.

Q: Wouldn't that keep you in work continuously?
A: No, I don't think so. It's not the fact of what we are that is keeping us in bondage, it's one's mismanagement of the whole situation. What we are has nothing to do with being bound. It's one's wrong assessment of the situation that has created that situation. Mahayanists don't say that you have to come to any kind of cessation on that level. The neuroses do not cease, as much as are seen for what they are. Not being able to see our own neuroses for what they are creates the neuroses, rather than having all these neuroses as an intrinsic thing and suffering from them.

Q: Are we going to do any meditation practice on mental events?
A: Almost all Buddhist texts are laid out in a particular format known as ground, path and fruition. That is the standard Buddhist way of approaching anything. Most of the time, ground is related to theoretical questions about Buddhism: where you start from, what you do, how you equip yourself to be able to take the journey. Then, you have the path - how to take the journey - and finally you attain the goal. We have almost finished ground.

Absolute and Relative Truth

To be able to understand what consciousness is all about in the context of Yogacara philosophy, we need to understand the classic Buddhist distinction between absolute and relative truth.

The distinction between the absolute and the relative is quite simple. Even in our normal experiences, things sometimes appear to be other than what they really are. We might have an impression of a particular person. Just from observing his overt behaviour we might say, "So and so is gentle" or "So and so is clever", but we could have come to the wrong conclusion. Through acquaintance, we might discover that the person we thought clever turns out to be a schmuck. Or we look through a window and see an ice-cream: it might turn out to be a clever device, it might turn out to be plastic. So, even in our normal experiences, there is this distinction between what appears to be and what really is.

This type of distinction is also made on the level of consciousness. We have certain impressions about ourselves, about who we are and what we are, and also a deeper level of who we are and what we are. Buddhist philosophies generally tend to treat the mind as completely momentary, as a point-instant. There is no duration of any sort and there is no persisting history of the mind. But, according to Yogacara, the mind can be divided into two levels. It can be treated as being on the absolute level and also as being on the relative level.

What is consciousness? When we talk about consciousness, we are really talking about the eight levels of consciousness. But there is another level - the state of basic awareness or wisdom - which is free from the eight levels. When we talk about consciousness on that level, it is a much more sophisticated experience. It is not the normal type of conscious experiences that we have.

It is said that the substratum of awareness is the basic ground upon which these two types of conscious experience exist. We have ordinary conscious experiences, as well as the experience of wisdom. The wisdom aspect of our consciousness and the ordinary aspect of our consciousness are abstractions from the substratum of awareness. I don't know whether *abstraction* is a good word for that. Maybe *extraction* is the right word. In other words, these two aspects rise simultaneously from the substratum of awareness. Neurosis and wisdom arise simultaneously. It's not that first you were quite clever and then you ate the apple and fell. The substratum of awareness contains both. We could either fall into our ordinary conception of ourself, which amounts to the same thing as forgetting ourselves, or we could discover who we are and come in close contact with ourselves. Both situations arise out of the substratum of awareness.

The higher level of consciousness, which is called basic awareness or wisdom, is the basic nature of our own mind. It is luminous and totally free from all kinds of neuroses and confusions, and is called Buddha-nature. On the other hand, we have ordinary subjective experiences which are subjected to all kinds of emotional imbalances.

We should be aware that this suggestion has some value in Buddhist tantra as well. Buddhist tantra puts much emphasis on luminosity and the basic freedom of the human mind. Yogacarins have been the precursor of that.

Basic awareness cannot be regarded as personal property. We cannot say, "This is my wisdom and you can't have a slice of it." The basic nature of our own mind is all-pervading, something everybody possesses, something everyone can discover and is intrinsic to our own being.

Yogacara philosophy has put much more emphasis on the luminosity aspect of the mind than on our empirical experience of consciousness. The Yogacarins have suggested that what we normally experience - all our emotional imbalances and neuroses and so on - are incidental, rather than intrinsic to ourselves. Those things come about due to a wrong assessment of the whole situation, due to our own ingrained habits. Once we undo our habits, then we begin to discover the basic nature of our mind, which is totally luminous and free from neurotic embellishments. These two polar situations in our conscious experience are labelled samsara and nirvana.

Samsara and nirvana, or bondage and freedom, are not explained in geographical terms. Nirvana is not something that you can go to. When the mind is freed from its own unnecessary paraphernalia, then it is able to discover its own basic being. Nirvana is one side of our consciousness and samsara is another, and it's going from one aspect to the other.

The reason we are unable to discover the luminosity aspect of the mind is because of our unconscious tendency to not acknowledge our own basic awareness. We take delight in being able to feel comfortable in the neurotic state and deny the freedom we possess.

It is said that, when we are experiencing the eight levels of consciousness, we are subjected to an impure state, impermanence, suffering and selflessness. *Impure state* means our mind is completely embellished and that we experience all kinds of emotional instabilities. *Impermanence* means that whatever we experience is momentary, whatever we think is permanent turns out to be impermanent. That experience leads to suffering. Whatever does not last creates tremendous suffering. That leads to selflessness.

On the other hand, if we are able to discover our own basic being, then that leads to a state of purity. Our mind is totally liberated from its own embellishments and emotional imbalances. That leads to a permanent state, which means whatever we experience is not impermanent, as we normally experience, and it does not produce suffering. So, there is a general sense of contentment or joy. Finally, it leads to the notion of a real self.

These views are quite interesting, in that Buddhists normally have said quite the opposite. Yogacara philosophy has turned to these notions and they turn out to be quite important in the tantra. So, there is a kind of transition from one state to the other, in a well-defined manner. What it amounts to is that, when our mind is corrupted with all kinds of neuroses and emotional imbalances, then we dwell in samsara and, once the corruptions are removed, then we attain nirvana.

It is said that the substratum of awareness also pervades our entire physical organism. The traces and dispositions are not totally mental. There are physical traces and dispositions, verbal traces and dispositions and mental traces and dispositions. Any physical act that we perform conditions our physical actions, any utterance that we might make through speech conditions our verbal activity and any mental act that we might perform leaves its own traces and dispositions. So,

there are three types of traces and dispositions. The substratum of awareness is understood as pervading the whole of the physical organism, rather than just residing in the brain.

If you have any questions, you are welcome.

Q: Could you go over that progression of impure state, impermanence, suffering and selflessness.

A: *Impure state* really means that we normally discover ourselves as being quite neurotic. We have all kinds of problems. This leads to the discovery of impermanence. The reason we happen to be neurotic is because we want things to be permanent, but they do not turn out to be so, which leads to suffering. We begin to suffer, because our expectations are completely shattered. That leads to loss of self, in some sense, selflessness. We begin to despair, due to an identity crisis of some sort.

The opposite of this is the state of purity.

Pure state means that we begin to discover who we are. There is no emotional instability, so whatever we experience has some kind of permanency. Things are not so temporary. In some ways, the less we expect things to be permanent, the more we begin to see them as being quite permanent. It's like waiting for a friend. The more quickly we want him or her to turn up, the longer it takes, but if we just relax, then it's so quick. That sort of thing. It depends upon our own subjective attitude. Obviously, we don't get disappointed each time something happens. That leads to happiness or joy and then to the discovery of self, which is discovering who we are.

So, that seems to be the order.

Q: I'm having trouble with why you're calling the identity crisis *selflessness*.

A: Our ordinary notion of self is no self at all. That is why it is called selflessness. What we normally think we are is not our self. The more we manufacture a notion of self, the less we have a clear idea about who we are. Labels that you put on yourself just turn out to be labels, nothing more.

In early Buddhism, it is said that everything is selfless, everything is impermanent, everything is suffering. Yogacara is saying that those things exist on the samsaric level, but if you pulled up your socks, then you could see the whole thing in quite a different light. What we normally experience as impermanent turns out to be relatively permanent, what we normally experience as being suffering turns out to be no suffering at all, and selflessness doesn't destroy you, but you begin to discover your well-being, your own basic nature. So, Yogacara philosophy is making a positive statement.

Q: In your teachings on the Four Dharmas of Gampopa, you said that there are three basic stages a meditator would go through. The first would be that one sees neuroses as being a tremendous hassle and something to get rid of, then one sees that they give glimpses of basic sanity and, finally, one sees that neuroses are the mind itself. Does Yogacara relate to the first two, and tantra the third?

A: No, Yogacara deals with the last two, in some sense. Tantra deals with the last two in greater detail than the Yogacara. This transformation of neuroses into

wisdom really goes back to Yogacara philosophy, but tantra expounds on it in greater detail.

Q: Could you expand on your comment that Yogacara differed from general Buddhist thought of the time.
A: Early Buddhists thought there was a sharp distinction between samsara and nirvana. If you are in samsara, then you need to get out, so to speak. You marvel at nirvana and see it as being a remote possibility that you might be able to attain at some stage in the future. Nirvana is also described as the state of cessation of one's neuroses or suffering. The Madhyamika school of later Buddhism said that neuroses really do not have any essential nature. They are basically empty. There is no substance in your neuroses, so you work at your neuroses that way. The more you understand that your neuroses are substanceless, the more you are able to free yourself. But there was no talk about transformation of neuroses into wisdom. The Yogacarins were the ones who said that neuroses can be transformed into wisdom. They don't have to be in conflict. Proper management of your neurosis would be transforming it into wisdom.

Q: Don't the tantric schools based on Madhyamika philosophy also talk about transformation?
A: There are differences within the tantric tradition, as well. Some tantric traditions have Madhyamika as the ultimate solution and others have a lot more sympathy towards Yogacara philosophy, but almost all of the tantric tradition would be indebted to Yogacara philosophy. In other words, on a practical level, most of the tantras would agree, but on the ultimate level they might have some disagreement.

Q: Isn't tantra also a practice used by magicians and shamans?
A: The tantras developed in a climate where there were a lot of magicians, but it is much more sophisticated than primitive magic. It is in keeping with Buddhist philosophy. If you have Hindu tantra, it's in keeping with Samkhya and yoga philosophies. There is a traditional bearing on all those schools. They are not arbitrary practices that developed out of primitive practice. They used some local practices, but that was quite arbitrary, in some sense.

Q: So the Yogacarin viewpoint leads to enlightenment, as does Madhyamika?
A: All these approaches would lead to enlightenment. It's just a matter of deciding which approach is palatable to you, from a practical viewpoint. People might debate about whether Yogacara has the solution or whether Madhyamika has the solution, but that is purely on a theoretical level. On the practical side, it is quite different.

Q: So for practitioners, the Yogacarin viewpoint may be easier to relate to, because it talks about the self and certain aspects of the mind, whereas Madhyamika doesn't deal with that sort of thing.

A: That's right. That's why there has been a lot of debate between Yogacara and Madhyamika.

To talk about the self is almost revolutionary, but Yogacarins do not mean any kind of metaphysical notion of self. It just means that you have developed a healthy attitude towards yourself and you don't suffer from any kind of identity crisis. The Yogacarins say that as soon as we give up the notion of self, or give up getting neurotic about ourselves, then we begin to become content with who we are. We don't strive to be someone else and, the more we appreciate who we are, then the more we come closer to who we are, which is discovering our own being. If, instead of formulating metaphysical notions of the soul or getting worked up about ourself, we begin to appreciate who we are and don't strive towards something that we would like to achieve or be someone that we are not, then we appreciate our own present situation more and are more able to become who we are. We are able to appreciate ourself and that leads to a healthy attitude towards the self. The more we try to be someone else, the more destructive it gets. In history, a lot of literary figures, poets and so on, famous people, have committed suicide because they tried to be someone else.

We might think, "There are so many Buddhist schools and they're all opposing each other", but we have to look at it from an overall perspective. Even from our own practitioner's point of view, it is chronological. We start off from early Buddhism and learn about impermanence, selflessness, suffering, et cetera. Then, we get onto the Mahayana level and learn about Madhyamika or about Yogacara, and proceed from there onto the tantric level and look at the whole thing from another perspective. It's a gradual development, both historically and personally. We don't get into Buddhist practice arbitrarily, we start from somewhere and then continue. We don't see any contradictions, because it is an evolutionary process. If we extract certain aspects from different schools, then we get really confused, because we don't see the overall structure. That seems to be a point we have to keep in mind.

Q: Yogacara and Madhyamika don't really disagree, it's just a matter of emphasis?
A: Fundamentally, that's right. Theoretically, they agree, in some sense. But practically, they are quite different. The approaches and emphasis are quite different. Madhyamikans do not emphasise the mind and practice as much as Yogacarins do. Yogacara always talks about the mind, whereas for Madhyamika both mind and matter are unreal.

Q: In the Zen tradition, the whole thing is to realise your basic nature, which is emptiness. That seems to go into Madhyamika, yet Zen is very practice orientated.
A: I would imagine that Zen Buddhists were more influenced by Yogacara philosophy than by Madhyamika. Historically, I think that's true, too. Not that they were unfamiliar with Madhyamika philosophy, but when they talk about understanding the nature of the mind, they talk about Zen mind, no-mind. The mind you discover is not mind from the ordinary point of view. It's not the mind you have understood in the past, it's something different. It's discovering your own nature, in some sense. But they don't say that the mind is totally empty, as the Madhyamikans would. The Madhyamikans would not leave room for

acknowledgment of the nature of the mind. If you want to be a thorough going Prasangika, you would have to demolish that as well, because it would disturb your conceptual paraphernalia, in some sense.

Q: Does neurosis vanish or dissolve once we transform it?
A: Neuroses get dispersed, in some sense, as you keep working with them with a healthy attitude. If you have a negative attitude towards your neuroses, that is another neurotic act, which only creates further neuroses. You have to have a proper attitude towards your own neurosis, which is to have some sympathy towards it, in some sense. Not necessarily to encourage it, but to just acknowledge the presence of the neurosis. You could say neurosis is bad, forget about it, but then it hits you in the face when you least expect it. So, you just can't ignore it. The best thing to do is acknowledge its presence and not get too worked up about it. If you get worked up about your neurosis, then you become more neurotic and finally get completely mired in it. So, a healthy attitude is necessary.

Q: Does that mean the neurosis dissipates just by understanding it or by being able to see it for what it is?
A: That's right. That's precisely the distinction between absolute and relative truth, actually. We don't even know our own neurosis. We haven't really properly discovered our neurosis. We think we know everything about our neurosis. We don't want to know any more about it, but the fact is, we don't enough about it. We don't really know what the neurosis is, we just know what it appears to be. That is the distinction between absolute relative truth. We know the appearance, the way it is presented to us, but we don't know what neuroses are really about, what they really are. We discover what neuroses really are through dealing with them with a healthy attitude. We don't look at neurosis from a neurotic viewpoint, but from a healthy viewpoint.

Q: Would Yogacarins say that what neuroses really are is that which pervades all phenomena?
A: I think it's the other way around, actually. Basic awareness or Buddha-nature is something that everyone possesses. It is not personal. It pervades everyone. In some sense, intrinsically, we are all the same and neuroses just happen to be incidental. Because we don't know what neuroses are all about, neuroses exist. The reason they're incidental is because the moment we begin to realise what neuroses are, they begin to dissipate. If they are something real, then they couldn't dissipate. They would still continue to exist. If something is real, it must exist indefinitely. But a neurosis is something that could come to an end, and the way it comes to an end is through proper assessment.

Q: So within neurosis there is absolute truth.
A: That's right. Even neuroses are permeated by our own intrinsic basic awareness. That's why neuroses can be worked with. That gives us the possibility of working with them.

Q: What's the basic difference between Madhyamika and Yogacara?
A: The real difference is that Yogacarins leave room for the existence of the mind in an ultimate sense, whereas the Madhyamikans wouldn't.

Madhyamikans would say to just look at the nonsubstantiality of the neuroses - the neuroses just come and go. It's not because your mother didn't breastfeed you long enough that you are getting neurotic. It's not because of past experiences, as much as your own preoccupation with it now, in the present state, either subconsciously or consciously, that is causing all those problems. That's why you happen to be neurotic. Because those things come and go, they're unsubstantial. They're empty. So, you contemplate that.

With the Yogacarins, you explore it further. Just to say that the neuroses are empty is not good enough. You must see what they are all about. What is that neurotic tendency? Where is it coming from? How is it making you neurotic? What is the nature of that neurosis? You try to work with it, rather than say it is empty.

Q: Don't Madhyamika and tantra involve working on the space that neurosis happens in, rather than worrying about the neurosis?
A: The practice side of tantra would be very much connected with Yogacara, but philosophically, on the ultimate level, most of tantra would go along with Madhyamika. Even the mind is empty in the ultimate sense.

Q: When you talk about healthy attitude, are you talking about what Chogyam Trungpa calls *sacred outlook*?
A: That's tantric language. That sort of thing comes along on the tantric level. But yes, it is the germinal aspect of that, in some sense. You have a basic healthy attitude towards the neurosis. You might not regard it as sacred, which is much more than saying you just relate to it in a friendly manner. Sacred outlook is almost, in a way, respecting your neurosis, which is hard to do. That comes at later stage. It's a much more daring approach, in some sense. But Yogacara has sown the seed for that kind of tantric notion, before tantra developed.

Q: So in Yogacara, no matter what neurosis you have, the essential self has always remained undamaged?
A: Yes.

Q: Whereas Madhyamika would say that no damage occurs because the whole thing was empty to begin with.
A: That's right. For Madhyamika, there is no being to be discovered. We just manufactured this whole notion of self, which doesn't exist at all. There's not even ground upon which we could build up a notion of self.

Yogacarins would say that we deviated from our basic being. We thought we needed some kind of self and strived towards it, which turned out to be fiction. But we don't manufacture ourself. We discover what we are by just being who we are. Normally, we try to discover ourself through painting or playing music or writing, whatever. The Yogacarins say that type of notion is totally mistaken. We don't

discover who we are that way. We just appreciate our present situation, appreciate our own basic being, and don't try to be someone other than who we are.

Q: You said you keep trying to find out who you are, through some sort of activity. What makes it not frustrating?
A: When you work with your neuroses, your motivation is not to have this gigantic self as a project that you would like to complete. It's just a way of relating to your present situation, to just be what you are. You look into yourself and explore your neuroses, instead of saying "These neuroses should not be there." You don't regard them as aliens who happen to invade your basic being. You regard them as being part of yourself. As you become more hospitable towards your neuroses, you begin to become gentle and sympathetic towards yourself as well. You begin to accept yourself much more that way and ,the more you accept yourself, the more you are able to come in close contact with who you are. It's not a linear process. You're going inwards, looking closely at who you are. Normally, even spiritual practices are used as going from A to B, but in this case you go inwards.

Q: When you are doing this process of working inwards, are you after some sort of ideal state?
A: The difference between this kind of notion of self and our ordinary notion of self is that our ordinary notion of self is divisive. Everything is put into pigeon holes. "This is my emotional instability." "This is my neurosis." "This is my body." "This is my mind." "This is my brain." "This is my head." Then, you discover that there is no you at all. But in this case, you become much more encompassing. Whatever you experience is you. You can't say, "This is my neurosis." The neurosis is not something apart from you. You can't make that division, so it's much more expansive and hospitable, which is a healthy sign.

This leads to the tantric notion of divine pride. When you do visualisation of deities, you take pride in yourself being the deity. This type of pride is not ordinary pride, thinking that you are better than some else, but is just a basic sense of well-being. As I said, Yogacara has sown the seed for this kind of notion. You feel good about yourself. You don't feel negative, which is totally destructive.

If you have an ordinary notion of self or pride, you become critical. You might become so critical about your practice that it might not make any difference. You practice so much, but you are critical. You could do better, so you begin to punish yourself, which is totally undharmic or unBuddhist. You feel good about your practice, you feel good about yourself, you feel good about your surroundings, which is the discovery of this other type of self that we are talking about. With the ordinary self, we always reject or discriminate or make judgments or punish ourselves. Normally, we punish ourselves all the time, through that notion of self. It's always criticising ourselves. You're not doing this, you are not doing that, you are bad. The fact is, we criticise ourselves much more than anyone else would criticise us.

Q: Doesn't the word *tantra* literally mean thread or continuity?

A: Yes. In some ways, even attaining enlightenment is not a dead end. Tantra really means it's a continual process. It's a dynamic process, rather than you come to a dead end and say, "This is it".

The Four Factors of Basic Being

We have talked about the four factors of purity, joy, permanence and ego: *tsang de rtag bdag* in Tibetan. *Tsang* is purity, *de* is joy, *rtag* is permanence, and *bdag* is ego. I thought we should go into some detail about these things before we proceed further and try to gain some understanding of what it really means when it is said that impurity is transformed into purity, misery into joy, and so on.

When purity is talked about, it is not looked at from some moralistic point of view. It is much more a psychological purity, rather than a moral dictum as such. So, what is meant here is that we are able to understand the nature of ourselves and look inwards, rather than just look out and label things arbitrarily. If, instead of seeing evil in others, we see the positive side of situations, then that obviously transforms our perception of the world. Instead of looking at everything in an impure way, our perception is transformed into purity perception.

It said that the more we perceive negativities in situations and in other people, the more frustrated we become. There is that kind of correlation between what takes place inside us and what takes place outside us. What takes place inside us depends upon what is taking place outside of us and how we view those things. We cannot really know what other people are like, since we can only see how someone behaves, see what someone does. Just using someone's external behaviour as a criterion to judge what that person is really like is mistaken. Instead of doing that, we should look inside ourselves and try to work out how we make assessments of different situations. It is said that the more we appreciate situations and other people, the less egocentric we become. But if we are unable to do this, then we become more egocentric and demanding on that level. So, overcoming one is overcoming the other as well.

When it is said that *we should appreciate the situation,* it does not mean that we have to look it at as being good or bad, or something of that sort, but just look at the situation as it is, rather than expecting it to be something other than it is.

Purity perception leads to the notion of joy or de. Joy is not understood in a euphoric kind of way. Normally, we think that joy is something that needs to be sought or that has to be acquired at some stage in the future, but in this sense, joy is discovered within ourselves, rather than externally. Normally, we think that if certain situations came about, then we would be joyous or happy. If we had a holiday house next to the sea we would be happy, or if we got a promotion in our job we would be happy. Sometimes, when we become spiritually inclined, that gets translated into spiritual terms as well, so instead of talking about holiday homes we talk about nirvana, instead of talking about job promotions we think about the bhumis.

Attitudes such as that are regarded, in fact, as being an anti joyous approach. We are looking at things from an *if - then* kind of situation. The situation already present is not assessed, so joy is unable to manifest. Joy comes about only when we are able to accept a situation as it is, which is not giving up hope and being in despair, but being able to relate to the situation that is present, rather than hoping that, if it was something other than what it is, then it would be something much more joyous than what we are experiencing now. It is said that if we seek joy or happiness, then we are not going to obtain it. In the scriptures, it also says that we

have been trying to seek happiness ever since we were born. We have not been able to obtain it, only because we have been seeking for it, rather than giving ourselves a break, just look at the situation and discover it. A lot of people die as seekers of happiness, but do not attain it.

That one leads to permanence, which is called rtag-pa or rtag. Permanence might create the image of eternalism. It might mean that we are going to be joyous forever, that if we fulfil certain conditions, then we are going to be blissed out for the rest of our life. But here, permanence really means being able to be in the moment and not brood about past situations or not chase after the future. As they say, tomorrow never comes. When tomorrow comes, it is already today, so tomorrow is never present and the past does not exist, it is no longer there. But, normally, we are unable to be in the present. We either brood over past situations or chase the future. Past experiences have left traces and dispositions on us. That influences our present situations, because we are unable to accept situations as they come along. The past has influence only because we were not able to make a proper assessment of situations when they arose. Since the situations did not get resolved, we are still being haunted by them in the present.

For instance, if we went on a cruise and it was a nice trip, we would feel happy about it. That would not have any influence on our present situation, but if we had a bad childhood due to an aggressive father, then that might colour our vision, colour how we view other people. Even if a situation like that has been resolved, still, when we see the way a particular person behaves, the way he smokes or drinks tea, that might trigger off memories of our father. It is said that we would carry present experiences into the future in an unhealthy way, if we are unable to make a proper assessment of the present, which comes about only when we are able to live in the present and not dwell in the past or the future.

There is a story in one of the Buddhist sutras about a man who is being chased by a tiger. He runs away, jumps off a cliff and discovers he is able to hang onto a strawberry plant. He looks down and it's deep underneath. He looks up and there is the tiger, standing at the edge of the cliff. Suddenly a rat starts eating at the root of the plant. The man looks up and down and then he pops one of the strawberries in his mouth and says, "Ah, that's wonderful."

Buddha says that the past and the future are like those two situations of the depth of the abyss and the tiger above. A person has to live like that man and enjoy the strawberry. As soon as he drops, he is not going to be there to suffer, what has happened is already in the past and the tiger is not going to get him.

Those situations lead to the discovery of healthy ego. The healthy ego is encompassing, rather than fragmented, as our normal conscious experiences are. It is also much more centred and covers both the unconscious and conscious side of ourselves. Normally, when people talk about superego or about self, it is a thing where the consciousness resides or to whom the consciousness belongs, but in this case there is no distinction between the two. The consciousness is the healthy ego and the healthy ego is the consciousness. And it's not only consciousness, but the unconscious side as well. The substratum of awareness is not a fully conscious experience as such, but all those things are covered by the notion of the healthy ego.

The more the practitioner looks into the whole situation, the more one discovers the field of consciousness. We are able to realise that our normal ego is just a small fraction of the entire structure of consciousness. It is said that egocentric mentation, which normally creates all these egocentric tendencies, gets transformed into what is known as wisdom of equanimity, which is seen as having a healthy ego at this particular point. Later on, we can discuss what wisdom of equanimity means.

We can again see that Yogacara philosophy has influenced tantra, because in the tantric tradition mirror-like wisdom, wisdom of equanimity and so on are an essential part of tantric psychology. The Yogacarins were the first to formulate such ideas.

If you have any questions, you are welcome.

Q: What do you mean by *tantric psychology*?
A: Tantric ideas about how the mind functions and how, by doing certain visualisations and so on, you are able to, in some ways, tap into certain psychological resources. Normally, these are divided into five categories. There is wisdom of equanimity, mirror-like wisdom and so on. Most of the time, the practices are directed towards how our ordinary way of relating to things can be transformed through changing our consciousness.

Q: Does living in the present mean that you don't plan for the future?
A: You plan for it, but a lot of people don't live in the present at all. That is why it is said that the present is permanent. Normally, we do not have any experience of permanence. We might go after permanence, but in fact, we are not living at all. Do you know what I mean? We don't experience what we are supposed to experience, because we are not living in the present, so we are unable to live at all. We're either dwelling in the past or in the present. But living in the present doesn't necessarily mean the future is forgotten. In some ways, if we live in the present properly, the future is already in the present. What we do in the present is much more important. That is what will influence our future. We could have some vision as to what we are going to do in the future, but it is what we do now that makes the difference.

Q: When you plan for the future, you don't dwell on it day and night, but a moment comes when you say, "What am I going to do tomorrow? Which way am I heading?" Are those sort of thoughts dwelling in the future or in the present? Is that healthy?
A: I think so. It is not said you shouldn't think about the future at all, it's saying that, normally, we do not even realise we do those things. So, in some ways, the moment you realise that you do those things, you already have one foot in the present. A lot of people are too speedy even to realise that. Sometimes we get so worked up and neurotic that we speed round and around until we lose the perspective of the whole situation. Then we can't make a proper assessment of the future, either. We are moving faster than we can keep up with ourselves.

Q: Is joy a meditative state of mind or can it be a normal everyday situation?

A: It is related to the meditative state of mind, to samatha experience, but it's not particularly euphoric. It's just a general sense of well-being, which is much more satisfying than being elated one minute and getting depressed the next, which is a kind of psychotic tendency. Manic depressives experience that sort of thing. Our normal experiences tend to be a bit like that, too. Joy is just a general sense of well-being, being able to accept the situation that is presented and not wishing it was something different.

We sometimes become petty. If a person is laughing, we ask "Why are you laughing? I'm miserable. When I'm miserable, why are you laughing?" If that person is crying, we say "Why are you crying? You're putting more burden on the already existing suffering situation." If your house is facing north, you want it to face south. Any number of wishes come about. So, I think it's just relating to the existing situation and feeling really good about it. That applies to yourself as well. If you feel really good, you do not wish you were doing something else or that you were more intelligent or more this or that. In a way, that is the most natural thing to do. But I don't think we can accept that, in some sense.

Q: Sometimes you seem to suggest that the joy has a reference point, that certain things such as meditation practice inspire you, but at other times you seem to say that joy doesn't have a reference point and is kind of self-manifesting.
A: Well, at the beginning there has to be some kind of reference point, but then it becomes more and more part of yourself. The initial excitement might wear out, but your experience of that sort of feeling might get extended, as it becomes more and more stable. I think that's the whole point.

For example, to do prostrations does actually not produce joy, but in some ways it excites that aspect, it brings it to the fore, or you begin to discover it through prostrations. The prostration is not producing it. If you took some drugs, the feeling is produced by that particular agency, but prostrations are not like that.

Q: It's just uncovering it.
A: Yes, that's right. I think that they are the means that you use to be able to discover your own innate qualities, in some sense. I think all those practices are related with that type of situation. You can't produce something that's not there.

Q: Does purity inspire joy and does joy inspire impermanence, and so on?
A: Yes, I think so, I think there is some kind of relative chronological order there.

Q: Often we feel that we are suffering because it's stimulated by another person. In my workplace, there is one person I constantly have to deal with, who I have a lot of trouble relating to and I get caught up in resentment or anger. I try very hard to bring Buddhist thinking to bear on that situation, but when I'm caught up in it, I forget. How could I deal with that situation in a Buddhist way?
A: Immediately, I don't think you could do very much at all. Most of the time, what happens is that some kind of habitual process is set up. That person does something and you react in a particular way. The best thing is to be able to work on other minor situations and then, in time, try to apply that with that person. In

the meanwhile, all you can do is try to be aware. Before you react, try to be aware of how you are doing it again. You are still reacting the way you used to. That sort of thing. Try to be aware before you react like that or even while you are reacting like that. If you discover that you are doing the same thing as you used to do, then you could stop that situation. But in the long run, I think it's a matter of getting out of the habitual process.

Q: But in the actual situation, your ability to function effectively is being jeopardised. You have to come up with some immediate way of dealing with that situation. You're saying there is not that much one can do, and to practise the development of awareness in less threatening situations until one build ups a way of dealing with more difficult situations. I think, *I have to* do this or that, or else I'm going to continue to be caught up in this situation.
A: But all the alternatives that you work out are equally unsatisfactory. If you react each time the other person does something or the other person reacts each time you do something, the situation gets worse and worse. You reacting to that person is not solving the situation. In fact, it's making it worse and worse, until it would get unbearable. So, it's really common sense logic. Why do it? If the other person does it that way, it doesn't mean you have to follow suit. It's just saying "This is not solving anything." You might feel that you are giving in and the situation is hopeless or you are accepting the situation through hopelessness, but I think if you can do that, you would feel much better in time.

Q: Maybe one of my mistakes is that I sometimes think the best thing to do is give up, that there is nothing I can do. But I feel bad about that. If I just accept it, maybe this is a sensible way to deal with it.
A: That's right. I think there is a difference between giving up and accepting the situation. Giving up is through lack of confidence or through helplessness.

Q: Once you've given up the fight, you still have to deal with the person. I can't avoid having to deal with this particular person.
A: But once you begin to accept the whole situation, then you might gradually develop a different way of looking at it. You can't expect miracles on the spot, but things do change that way. A lot of the time, we act in the same way, but if we adopt a new way of looking at the whole thing, if we adopt a new stance, we are able to see the same situation in a different light. It happens constantly in our ordinary experience, too.

Q: What's the difference between neurosis and psychosis?
A: The difference is really whether you are doing retreats or whether you are wandering around in the streets. No, the difference is psychotics are normally treated clinically by psychiatrists and they're on pills or treatment. They're under intensive care, whereas the neurotics just....

Q: Could you say something about applying these things that you've taught tonight As you go along and practice and develop them, the neurotic tendencies become heightened.
A: Sometimes, when we try to apply these things, we might think that we're making no progress or that, in some ways, we're becoming more neurotic in terms of dealing with certain situations, but those things are really part of the process itself. In some sense, you become more aware. I think you have to be gentle with yourself, instead of feeling how bad the whole situation is and that the interaction between me and others is not healthy. Instead of feeling claustrophobic with that whole situation, you need to let in a bit of fresh air and have gentleness towards that type of sensitivity, and accept it as well. We have to relate to situations, otherwise we are going to feel more and more bogged down. But if you are able to really relate to it and accept it, then it's a different situation.

Q: But that requires the utmost skill. If I go out of this room and repeat that to myself, this little voice will pop up in the back of my mind and say "Who are you trying to kid?"
A: Sometimes it is good to be critical about your practice and about your progress, because you might be deluded into thinking that you are doing something fantastic. But at the same time, our tendency is to become really self-critical. We become more and more critical and then we are unable to relate to the whole situation properly.

Sometimes those things crop up, because we are too concerned about the other person. I think martyrdom manifests in a crude form, in some sense. Sometimes we have to accept the situation and not feel that we are responsible for everything, because we could go the other way and think everything is created by us and that we are the worst person, or we are not making a proper assessment of the situation. That is another egocentric approach. Because we wish that we were different, because we wish that we had more capabilities to deal with the situation, then we are expecting the situation to be something other than it is. The best thing to do is say, "This is how it is, but there is no need for me to feel responsible and carry the whole burden."

Q: I've found that working through things in oneself doesn't always lead to the environment being dynamic, because if the other party with whom you are relating has very fixed ideas, then they don't even recognise that there can be any movement. So, it's all really occurring within your own mind. Only within your own mind can you change anything external.
A: That's right. You could do certain things to try to help the other person, but a lot of the time it doesn't work. So, instead of having two stubborn people, I think it's best that there is only one. Sometimes people can't be changed, so instead of keeping on at it, I think the best thing is just to have a healthy attitude and not expect any dramatic change. That happens a lot. That's why, if you could change your own way of looking at things a bit, all those situations would get less serious, in some ways. As they say, it takes two to tango. If the other person is punching at a bag of air, then he might realise something, too.

The Five Omnipresent Mental Events

We have concluded the discussions on the mind, so now we can venture into a discussion of the mental events.

I think it appropriate to mention that when Buddhists talk about mental events, it is based upon their own experiences, based upon an introspective method.

In the West, this type of approach has been questioned in many ways. Academic psychologists, particularly, feel that an introspective method is not at all valid, because you cannot observe what a person is feeling and you cannot actually display what you are feeling to others. Not only that, but an introspective method is untrustworthy, because one person could experience one thing and someone else could experience something else, so it is very difficult to come to a consensus.

But the Buddhist approach seems to be quite different. You do not talk about your mental processes as everyone else experiences them: you have done meditation, worked through your own preconceptions and so on. So, whatever has been said in Buddhist texts is said not through prejudices, but as by an unbiased individual. I think the introspective method has to be re-evaluated, in some sense, because, despite the popularity of Freud and Jung, this method is regarded by a lot of academic psychologists as being extremely questionable. As we have seen throughout these talks, Buddhists have adopted a form of the introspective method.

There are five mental events that accompany all of our perceptual situations, that accompany any type of perceptual experience, and they are known as the five omnipresents. In Tibetan, that is called *kun 'gro lnga*. Two of the five omnipresents have already been discussed when we talked about the five skandhas, the five psychophysical constituents: feeling-tone and conception.

Whatever we experience has some kind of *feeling-tone* involved, whether pleasurable, unpleasurable or neutral. Buddhists distinguish between the mental and physical aspects of these three types of feelings.

This is interesting, because in the West, people have either tried to reduce bodily feelings to mind or mental feelings to organic things. A perfect example of this is that psychoanalysis attempts to explain all types of tension, anxiety, suffering and pain through some kind of psychological model, without referring to the physical aspect. Behaviourists, on the other hand, try to reduce mental processes to the physical level.

But, as far as Buddhists are concerned, it does not have to be explained that way. We have bodily pain and bodily pleasure, as well as mental pain and mental pleasure, and these two things are co-related. For a lot of common-sense people, who are not professional psychologists or philosophers, this might sound simple. This is how we experience things.

It is quite straightforward, but you might get surprised, if you read some standard Western texts on this. The whole thing has been a hot debate. They try to work out whether the pain you experience is a bodily situation or a mental situation. It is really quite an interesting thing to contemplate on. A lot of books try to explain all mental processes through physiological descriptions. When you get angry, certain glands operate, squirt hormones and so on. On the other hand, other texts try to explain everything through unconscious activities. Whatever you

experience has something to do with your unconsciousness: drive and all kinds of things like that.

In any case, in the Buddhist approach there are two types of feelings: the bodily and the mental and they are co-related. Another interesting thing Buddhists say is that a feeling-tone does not come about accidentally, but through some cause. There is a reason why we experience pain, there is a reason why we experience pleasure. These things just don't take place accidentally, so we cannot complain about them.

Normally, if we experience pain, we complain and say someone else is responsible or certain situations are responsible. But there is a reason related to our own personal history, in terms of what we have done in the past and what we are doing now, that causes certain situations to take place which result in either pain or pleasure, be it mental or physical. This has been discussed in the five skandhas section as well.

The next mental factor is *conception*. As we have discussed, conception is related to the discursive faculty of the mind: trying to categorise things, trying to put everything into pigeon holes, trying to have a neat world. Everything is a package deal, everything is neat and tidy, there are no loose ends. In some individuals particularly, this is very much so. Everything is down the line and there is no room for movement or flexibility. Everything is compartmentalised. That is conception, which is also an aspect of the five skandhas.

Then, we move onto the mental factors that are particularly related to the five omnipresents. The first is known as *directionality of mind*. In Tibetan, it's called *sems-pa*. Buddhists say that the mind is active and creative, rather than passive and receptive, and that is what directionality of mind means.

If you are walking down the street and notice something in a showcase, you might think that the object is impinging on your visual sense organ, but Yogacara psychology says the mind itself, by nature, is creative, so you direct your mind to a particular object, rather than your attention being drawn to an object by the object. We say, "My attention was drawn to this object. I couldn't get my attention off it." But, in fact, your own psychological processes direct the mind to that object. That is what directionality of mind means. And it is not just objects, but psychological processes, also. Whether they are healthy or unhealthy, we could direct attention upon those mental events as well. So, mind by nature is constitutive or creative.

The fourth mental factor is known as *egocentric demanding*. In Tibetan, it's called *yid-la byed-pa*. Directionality of mind is related to perception of an object as a whole. Egocentric demand is directed at the specific characteristics of that object.

Normally, we might think that a particular object interests us: "This is what I want." If it's a piece of chocolate, we think, "I would like chocolate." We might go for it, but we do not go for the chocolate as a whole. There is some characteristic, such as the nuts in it or a certain taste that we are interested in. We just do not go for the chocolate by itself. We might direct our mind to the chocolate and think, "That is chocolate", and then there is a particular reason why we take an interest in it: how it looks, or how it tastes. So, two situations are involved. The difference between directionality of mind and egocentric demand is the transition from the general to the specific.

The last mental factor is known as *rapport*. Rapport actually means that a sense organ, a particular object, and a consciousness are unified in our own experience. Whenever we experience something, there is an objective aspect, the appropriate sense organ, and the consciousness that accompanies those two factors, so three things converge at the point of rapport. It is said that rapport is not a totally discursive activity or intellectual process, but it provides the possibility for feeling to arise. There is a feeling-tone, as well as a cognitive aspect, involved.

Traditional Western psychologists used to make a distinction between cognitive and affective mental faculties, affective meaning the emotional aspect and cognitive meaning the discursive or intellectual aspect of the mental faculties. As far as Buddhists are concerned, we cannot make distinctions between what is cognitive and what is affective.

For instance, behaviourist psychologists have conducted experiments putting rats through a T shaped maze. On one head they have food and on the other they have a gadget that would give the rat an electric shock. They would send a rat through the body of the T. At first, the rat would go either way, either to the food or to the electric shock, but finally, it invariably went to the food. The psychologists concluded that rats have some cognitive ability. But they excluded the affective side completely. What about how the rat feels? That's totally excluded. As long as the rat went the right way, they thought "This rat has intelligence." But even we can observe that rats are terrified.

Still, a lot of people, to this day, make sharp distinctions between cognitive and affective states of mind. Buddhists do not make that distinction between what is cognitive and what is affective. If the mind executes some cognitive act, an affective aspect accompanies it. If you withdraw from a particular stimulus - an electric shock - you withdraw not just because of your body, not just because of the nervous system, but because of how you feel when that stimulus is provided for you. It's as simple as that. So, in this case, in terms of rapport, consciousness has the aspect of being both cognitive and affective.

The reason these mental factors are called *the five omnipresents* is because they accompany all mental activities. Without them, we cannot experience anything.

First, we direct our mind to a particular object, then towards a certain characteristic of that object. Rapport has to take place, so there has to be a feeling-tone involved in the situation and a conceptual process that classifies the whole thing.

So, that's why they're called the five omnipresents. They accompany every mental activity.

Maybe we should stop at this point. If you have any questions, you are welcome.

Q: You said the mind is active in the process of what object it fixes itself on. Why is it that the mind does fixate itself on one object, as opposed to another?
A: That's precisely because of the directionality of mind.

Q: But what decides the direction?
A: It's due to that mental factor. That is what it means. Due to that factor, we direct our mind to a particular object. It's a common saying that "My attention was drawn

to this object". But why not some other object? If objects impinge on your visual organ, then you could direct your mind to any object, arbitrarily. But that does not happen. You direct your mind to a particular object.

Q: If there are a number of objects you could direct your mind to, why do you direct it to the one on the right, rather than the one on the left?
A: It has a lot to do with traces and dispositions. You drag your mind to a particular object. You do it deliberately. Most of the time, we drag our mind to an object we have dragged our mind towards all along. People who like clothes always stop by a clothing shop. They might just be walking along and, suddenly, they pass a clothing shop. They will turn and look. When I pass along the street, I look at the bookshops. So, it's something like that.

First, you just notice the clothing shop. You drag your mind towards it, but then certain clothing might interest you. You just don't go in and buy arbitrarily: certain things interest you. You drag your mind towards them and that is egocentric demanding. If I go into a bookshop, I wouldn't buy any book. Egocentric demand would be demanding something. So, it's that sort of thing. If you are a vegetarian, then you would always notice vegetarian food stores, but you would not notice other restaurants. But if you are interested in Chinese food, you would notice the Chinese restaurants. It's as simple as that.

This is why it is said that the mind is constitutive, that we drag our mind towards a particular object. There has been a lot of debate about whether the mind is passive or active. Buddhists would say that mind is active. There are others who would say the mind is like a mirror that reflects all images, that the mind doesn't direct itself at all, but is just passive and receptive, that all information comes from the object and is fed into the cerebral and mental faculties. Buddhists would say the mind is constitutive, because the mind has the capacity of being selective. I think that is all it boils down to. The mind has the capacity of being selective. You just don't go around making arbitrary choices. You make certain choices. You are selective.

Q: Are you saying that, if you are in a situation where a large amount of information is available to you, the things you fix your mind on in is your decision?
A: Just the directionality of mind. At a football match, all these people are there, but different people drag their minds towards different things. These people are there with some general consensus, they all like to watch football, but you will discover that some people go there to watch the crowd, others watch the football players, others watch other things. They all drag their attention towards certain things. There might be something that would make them drag their attention to something or other and then egocentric demand draws the attention or interest towards a specific thing.

Q: And that also applies to feelings? It doesn't just apply to objects?
A: Sure. There are feeling-tones involved as well. If the players on the wrong side kick the football in the right way, you might react violently. There are feeling-

tones on that level. The crowd in general might create a certain feeling-tone or mood.

You can't experience anything without some kind of feeling-tone. All the other mental factors are involved as well. You categorise, you pigeonhole things. Unless you do that, you would not be able to make distinctions from one thing to another. Everything is compartmentalised in some way. We all do that, some people more than others. Everyone has all the mental factors, but some people have certain mental factors as a predominant characteristic. If you are intellectual by nature, conception might be a predominant characteristic. If you are an emotional person, feeling-tone might be your predominant characteristic. When you say someone is observant, what is observant? Maybe directionality of mind and egocentric demand predominant in those people. But that doesn't mean that someone who is observant does not feel anything. Because you are so neat and tidy and everything is down the line does not mean you don't have other characteristics. There are degrees of those mental factors.

Q: And the traces and dispositions...
A: ...determine what factor predominates. All the mental factors are influenced by your past experiences. They have left traces and dispositions, so you feel in a certain way. You feel in a certain way and your feeling cannot be shared by others, because that is your feeling. That is the result of your own traces and dispositions. Someone else feels another way, because of their traces and dispositions. You conceptualise in a particular way and that is your way. Someone else does the opposite and that's his or her way of conceptualising. This type of thing is always happening.

As we said, the mental factors are subsidiary. The mind is more important. When we talk about mental events, we always have to keep the eight levels of consciousness in mind. They play the most important role: all the other mental factors are influenced by them. When we discuss healthy and unhealthy mental factors, it depends upon how the mental factors are managed. Certain mental factors would leave healthy and wholesome traces and dispositions and other mental factors would leave unwholesome and unhealthy traces and dispositions. That's how our life is influenced, in some ways.

Q: I find this a bit depressing, when I think that the fact I direct my mind at certain objects or that I have certain feeling responses is predetermined by my traces and dispositions. I feel a like a prisoner of the traces and dispositions.
A: That's very true, I think, in some ways, Yogacara philosophy shares this with Freudian psychoanalysis. Seriously.

With psychoanalysis, you are subjected to your drives, instincts and unconscious tendencies and, due to that, all kinds of anxieties are created. Yogacara psychology would go along with that, to a certain degree. But Freud said you can never dispense with your ordinary suffering. You are stuck with it. You are stuck with your ordinary experience of traces and dispositions and there is nothing you can do. If it gets out of control, then psychoanalysis can do something. In other words, if you become crazy, then psychoanalysis can do something. But

everyone is subjected to their instincts and drives, so we suffer. Freud said psychoanalysis was not to cure normal suffering, but to cure abnormal suffering.

The Buddhist approach is that you cure normal suffering. You can make a proper assessment of all these traces and dispositions whereby you see how you are creating them. In some ways, the whole thing is predetermined, but you can also see how you are actually imprisoning yourself. You're also told the best way to approach the whole thing, It's not as if you just observe it and try to work out the best way. Buddhists say how you can actually work through it, how to see that whole chain reaction happening and how to make a proper assessment of it.

When Buddhists say *directing your mind to a particular object*, you could drag your mind to a healthy mental event or an unhealthy mental event. Due to that, you leave traces and dispositions, which might be harmful or helpful. Through the development of prajna, you are able to make that assessment.

Prajna means intelligence, rather than intellect, because it is not intellectual activity as such. It's an intelligent way of acting. In some ways, it is related with speculation, I suppose, but it has more to do with action, how to behave properly.

You could be a psychiatrist, but suffer from all kinds of things. You could be a child psychologist, but not understand children at all.

Prajna is related to that mental faculty which acts, which is able to make a proper assessment, without being too emotionally wrought and, at the same time, not get carried away intellectually. There is that meeting point, in some sense. That's the faculty you develop, to be able to make a proper assessment of your mental events.

Q: But isn't that very process of assessing the situation correctly also determined by traces and dispositions? Why is it that some people do direct their attention at those sort of things and others don't? Wouldn't that also be determined by traces and dispositions?
A: At the beginning it would be, but the more you realise that your activities cannot be predetermined by your traces and dispositions, the more you get freed from them. In other words, you make use of traces and dispositions in a positive way. You do not have to adopt another approach. You make use of your traces and dispositions in a way that is helpful to you, rather than misusing them, which we normally do. That's the whole point. Normally, we don't know that those things take place.

Q: Do you mean we use the traces and dispositions themselves to learn about them, so we can free ourselves from them?
A: Yes. And also direct them to direct our mind or develop feeling-tones that are good for us, such as compassion and love. Those feeling-tones have to be developed. If we have feeling-tones that are emotionally self-defeating, then we don't need to develop them.

That's how you make use of mental events, as well as the traces and dispositions. The more you are able to make a proper assessment of the mental events, the more positive traces and dispositions are left on your substratum. Then, you are able to act better. You are able to act more precisely and accurately.

In some ways, all this really comes down to just saying that to be able to act means to be able to act intelligently, and to be intelligent means to be able to act properly. Traces and dispositions and all these other things are really discussed to make us see how we can do these things.

As I said, all these things can really be observed. All we have to do is look in and see how they're happening. It's not as if they're inaccessible and we have to do something else to be able to get access to them. We experience these things all the time, so we just look at them in this particular context and see how they're interrelated and what they're all about.

Q: You said we have feeling-tones which are either pleasurable, unpleasurable or indifferent. In a previous lecture, we were talking about the fact that, according to the Yogacara school, there was no such thing as an indifferent feeling. It was either pleasurable or unpleasurable.

A: That's true. That still applies. Even when we think we experience an indifferent feeling, still, it is a feeling. That's what Yogacara means. It does not mean that you think you are feeling nothing. People say, "I'm so exhausted from my emotions. I have come to a point where I feel nothing." But how can you feel nothing? That's what you have to look into. When you think you are feeling nothing, as soon as you look into it, how can you feel nothing? It has to be something, either pleasurable or unpleasurable and, invariably, it's an unpleasurable feeling. That's what the whole thing is all about. Sometimes you consciously feel pleasure, sometimes you consciously feel unpleasurable things and sometimes you feel that you don't feel anything. But there is no state where you do not feel anything. Even not feeling anything is a kind of feeling. Otherwise, you wouldn't say it.

Q: Some people or some cultures seem to be more emotional than others. How does that relate to this idea of feeling?

A: Again, it's because of traces and dispositions. Some cultures are taught to be like that, so they become like that.

If you look at mathematicians or logicians, then conceptual mental events dominate all the others. But if you look at people who go to primal therapy, then they would have more feeling-tones. They want to experience primal pain, as it is called. There's primal pain that you experienced when you were a child, but you haven't experienced it since. So, you have to experience primal pain. Much emphasis is placed on feeling-tone, on that level. If you talk to these people, they just want to feel. They don't want to do anything else. Sometimes, for those people, feeling and experience become synonymous. To experience means to feel and to feel means to experience.

Q: Would you say that Western cultures are very much into the feeling-tone aspect?

A: No.

Eastern traditions, whether Hindu or Buddhist, are mostly integrative. They do not make too much distinction between feeling-tones and cognitive faculties. But in the West, there is always some kind of dualist approach involved. That is totally anathema to any type of Eastern approach.

In the West, either so much emphasis has been placed on the body that you become materialistic or you place so much importance on the mind that you become mentalistic - everything is reduced to mind. Even in the sciences, we have pure mathematics that you just speculate about, that you marvel at, and then we have applied mathematics. We have pure physics and applied physics. The whole of Western culture, in some way, has that dual approach.

In some ways, Westerners have achieved the optimum level of intellectual exercise. Compared to the East, Westerners really have achieved all kinds of intellectual excellence. But, on the other hand, due to that, people experience all kinds of emotional things, so they become totally emotionally orientated.

What Buddhists say is that this has to be integrated. You can't be one way or the other. There has to be some meeting point between the two. You don't become so intellectually orientated that you become a sterile philosopher, as it has been said, and you don't become so emotionally involved that you are blinded by the whole thing.

Q: I think Western cultures specialise in egocentric demanding.
A: I think that's a general tendency. I don't think everything the East does is particularly fantastic. It has its own shortcomings, too. That's what people who take interest in Eastern cultures, as well as people who try to introduce Eastern things into the West, should learn.

Again, there has to be some kind of meeting point. You can't turn everything into Eastern things or just stick to purely Western things. There has to be some kind of meeting point. People are not able to get what they want out of Western culture without turning to the East, but in the East also, people are faced with a lot of problems because of their own lack of certain things.

Q: Conception, apart from categorising, has the same function as directionality of mind: directing your mind to a particular object?
A: Directionality of mind, most of the time, would precede conception. First, your mind is directed towards a particular object. Then, you begin to categorise, put on labels and draw all kinds of conclusions out of that.

Q: So it's split from conception?
A: Yes. Directionality of mind does not make distinctions. It is not discriminatory. Conception is discriminatory. With directionality of mind, your attention is directed towards a particular object. Conception follows from that.

Q: From the point of view of Theravada, Buddhism is based on two main structures. One is *maitri* and the second is this awareness, which ultimately ends in *panna*.
A: That's *prajna*.

Q: Yes. Is this where you begin to develop awareness?
A: We haven't discussed awareness, yet. We haven't said what kind of mental faculty makes you able to assess the whole thing, because it is said that that type of

mental faculty is something people don't have access to, in ordinary terms. You have to make some effort to acquire that mental faculty. But if you make the effort, you can acquire it.

There are only two types of mental events that people don't have access to in normal circumstances. The first one is concentration. We find it so difficult to concentrate on anything. The other one is intelligence, prajna. These two mental factors are something people have to make some kind of effort to develop. But all the others are there. All you have to do is turn inside and really look.

For instance, in meditation, you don't have to judge all your mental processes, saying "I'm feeling anger in meditation, so that's bad" and you feel terrible about it, or feel "I'm thinking about the Buddha, I'm so fantastic." You just have an unbiased approach to your meditation. The more you develop that, the more you are able to become objective about your own mental processes. So, the introspective method itself becomes totally unbiased. You are able to observe whatever is happening inside you, without having to categorise it, using too much of the mental event of conception. You just observe the whole process. That's why the introspective method becomes valid.

Otherwise, as has been said by some Western psychologists, you could feel one thing, someone else could feel another thing, and what is the criterion? How do you judge the whole thing? A lot of people feel like that, too. But if you just constantly observe whatever you experience with an open attitude, it just comes and goes and you will be able to make better judgments about how you feel.

Q: Do you analyse anything that arises, or just observe it and let it pass?
A: There are two types of meditation. The first is sitting meditation or samatha, where you just observe and everything comes and goes. The other one is known as vipasyana or analytical meditation, where you analyse what you experience and you question. You do not necessarily have to sit in a meditation posture. You could just be sitting quietly in the corner and you question what you experience, you analyse what sort of feelings are coming up.

Sitting and analysing have to go together, because sitting meditation makes it possible for you to not jump to conclusions. If you just adopt the analytical approach, you might jump to all kinds of conclusions in a hasty way. But with sitting meditation, you just observe and experience and then analytical meditation makes you able to see how the experiences come, the reason for that, whether the substratum of awareness has anything to do with the whole thing, whether there are such things as traces and dispositions. You have to really question all those things and, if they are there, then how are they interrelated, how does the substratum of awareness and traces and dispositions influence your life?

Q: Can you pick up a day's event and use that as a vipasyana meditation?
A: Sure. You can take up any event and see why has it happened. You have to question. "Why has this happened?" And you don't stop for the obvious reason. There's always an obvious answer, but you have to, again, question why that has happened. "Why is that reason there?" This is the difference between being intellectual and being intelligent.

When you are exercising this sort of thing, it is personal. You're trying to learn something for yourself. You are trying to learn what the whole thing is all about and what you are. Being intellectual, in some ways, means we become numb about those things. We choose to speculate about other things, rather than contemplate on what we are experiencing.

Q: That's a very profound, that prajna has more to do with action. It's only wisdom that can really make you act in the right way and it is, I think, only through that wisdom that one acts.
A: That is true co-relating of analytical meditation with your day-to-day living situations. If they are co-related and not divorced, then whatever takes place takes place in a wholesome way. But if they are divorced, then, in some ways, if you become too intellectual and do not pay any attention to your daily situations, there is no intelligence at all. It is severed from your experience and you are not reflecting on that, at all. It applies to the other extreme, where we just want to feel and not look at it.

Q: Sometimes I think I have the answer to something and then, as time goes on, I change my mind about what the answer is. I don't trust my analysis any more.
A: Well, that's okay. That is what analytical meditation is all about. Because, if you feel comfortable - "Finally, I've done it" - that might be more deceptive than inquisitive.

That's what this whole thing generates. You become more and more inquisitive about things. There is no stopping on that level. But, at the same time, if you reflect on the whole thing, you would realise you have learned so much through that analysis, despite the fact you haven't gained any definite answer. Everyone wants some definite answer - "This is it!" - but you don't get to that stage. But I think you would feel you have really understood a lot about yourself through the analysis. A definite answer comes along only when you have obtained some kind of meditative state. You just don't get any kind of real answer, but whatever you learn is an answer in itself.

That type of trial and error dialectical procedure is taking place all the time. You commit one error and that is corrected. You make another error and then that is corrected. But it's a hierarchical procedure. Each mistake is more sophisticated than the previous one and the next mistake is more sophisticated than the last one. It's really like that. If you want to be a mathematician, that applies. If you were doing a job, that also applies. If you were doing business, again, that applies. You learn more and more. From each mistake, you learn more.

Meditation or the spiritual path is not different. The only difference is you can't take something and say "Look what I discovered during my meditation." You can't show it to others. It's not a public phenomena. But still, that's how it happens. If you look at yourself, you would discover that each mistake has not been a real mistake. In some ways, it has enhanced your intelligence. Because you made that mistake, you are able to look at it from another angle. That's what the path is.

If you have the answer, you don't need to meditate. You don't need to take any journey, because you are already there. A journey involves this dialectical procedure of trial and error, but you are becoming more sophisticated all along.

Q: Is the outcome of this trial and error process and working with the traces and dispositions to develop ultimate freedom?
A: Yes. Ultimate freedom is being completely free from your own traces and dispositions. That is what the whole thing is all about. But if you take ultimate freedom to mean that you are so free you don't have to conform to anything, that would be a mistake. Freedom really is subjective, and that sort of freedom can be achieved.

Q: Like creating freedom to become more intelligent?
A: And also be more spontaneous and so on, because you are not subjected to traces and dispositions. You could act one way or another. You have a lot more possibilities.

With traces and dispositions, you act the same way, again and again. If you become angry, you might act quite differently from the way you used to, for a while, but then it becomes habitual, and there is no creativity and spontaneity at all. But the more you are able to relate to that anger, the more room there is for creativity and spontaneity, in some sense, and that is the expression of freedom.

People complain about external influences all the time. I am compelled to do this, I am compelled to do that, because of this, that, and the other. The whole blame is placed on external circumstances. But no one really bothers to look inside and see how they have been imprisoning themselves through certain acts and the consequences of those acts. If we do that, then we begin to discover that external influences are really not so great at all, compared to what we are doing to ourselves. It's as simple as that, but normally we don't want to realise it.

It's much easier to say "these people are responsible" or "this circumstance is responsible for what has happened to me", rather than look at ourselves. It's always up to us to make decisions. You could be in one situation or another, you could be doing this or that, and all these possibilities are there. But a lot of the time, even when we want to make these choices, we think we have made a new choice, but in the end it turns out we have made the same old choice. We always say "This time it's going to be different" and it turns out to be the same old story.

Q: Do traces and dispositions exhaust themselves or, once created, do they remain forever?
A: They get exhausted.

Q: So you begin to introspect and examine and develop prajna, you consciously create positive traces and dispositions....
A: ...and then transcend them, as well. That's how you exhaust them.

Q: But first you throw out the rubbish, the bad traces and dispositions, and try to replace them with....
A: ...wholesome ones. And transcend those, until you begin to discover that the substratum of awareness and the rest of it have been quite positive all along. That's where the transmutation takes place, in some ways. You don't throw them away, as

much as discover their own innate nature. Even the negative traces and dispositions have some kind of psychic energy. What the practice does is channel that energy into something more positive. At first, it might be a habitual process, to a certain degree, but in a much more wholesome way. Then, gradually, it becomes less and less habitual, because you are giving the traces and dispositions less and less chance to rest. Finally, you realise that your own substratum of awareness is wisdom, as Buddhists would say. In Christian terms, it may be God. If there is such a thing as God, that's it. You discover your own richness there.

Q: Are there are gross and subtle traces and dispositions?
A: There are, yes.

Q: So there is a continual process. You might transcend some of the coarser negative traces, but you still have some subtle ones remaining.
A: Yes, that's right. In Buddhism, traditionally, traces and dispositions are classified into two levels. The first is emotional instability and the second is intellectual perplexity.

Emotions are much more gross and rugged, much more dramatic. You are able to detect them and you begin to become less and less neurotic. Emotions, here, should be understood as the neuroses. Compassion, love and joy are also there and they could be regarded as emotions, too. But all the neurotic tendencies begin to diminish, because they're much more dramatic and we can detect them.

Intellectual perplexity is mainly related to all kinds of metaphysical questions. You don't have to be a philosopher to have certain ideas about who you are, what you are, what the world is all about. You might have all kinds of misconceptions due to that, so you work through that, later on. This is also emotionally charged, mind you, but in a much more subtle and sophisticated sense.

So, this goes on for quite a while, even when you are relatively awake, even when you begin to realise your own substratum of awareness as being wisdom or Buddha-nature. Even the traces and dispositions become more and more sophisticated, so a trial and error process applies there as well, because you have more sophisticated errors to deal with.

So, this procedure takes place continuously. But still, in some ways, detecting one error is a step forward. It's not as if you haven't made any progress at all. Sometimes you might feel that way, but still, it's a step forward.

Q: For me, one of the greatest disappointments is when some disposition I think I have be come aware of disappears for a couple of years, and then comes back.
A: You need to have regular practice. If you have regular practice, then you could really work through that. A lot of the time you might feel, "Finally, I have the answer", and you begin to relax. Then, you don't do anything until the whole thing hits you in the head so that you can't help but wake up, only to realise you haven't really continued with the whole procedure. In some ways, that's the whole reason for the need to have regular practice.

The Five Object Determining Mental Events

We are going to be discussing the five object determining mental events. In Tibetan, they are called *yul-nges-lnga*. *Yul* means *object*, *nges* means *determining*, and *lnga* means *five*, so *five object determining mental events*. The reason they are called *object determining mental events* is because, whatever our perception of the physical world may be, there would be one or more of these mental events accompanying our perception. They are a necessary component, in some sense, as far as our perception of the world is concerned.

The first one is known as *interest* and is called *'dun-pa* in Tibetan.

Interest, in this particular context, is distinguished from desire. People normally tend to confuse the two and are unable to make a distinction between desire and interest, thinking that if you desire something, then you are taking an interest in it, or if you have some interest in something, then you desire it as well.

The text makes a sharp distinction between these two. It says that interest is related to appreciating or seeing an object as it is. Desire is wanting to use a certain object for some purpose, for one's own purpose. So, there is always an end in the mind, when we desire something, but as far as interest is concerned, that is not so. We just take interest in whatever is presented to us.

We could take interest in things that are presented purely through sensory perceptions, as sensory inputs. We see a particular object and then we begin to take interest in it, or we hear a certain sound and we take interest in that. Interest can be generated through introspection, from observing our mental processes. Interest can also be developed through totally conceptual processes, without any sensory input.

If someone comes along and talks about a particular person, interest might begin to develop. We might want to meet that person, even though we don't know them. Or if we read about a particular piece of music, then interest might develop whereby we go out and buy that record.

So, interest can be generated either through sensory inputs or through conceptual processes. It doesn't matter which type the interest may be, it should be distinguished from desire. Taking interest does not mean desiring something. Interest is at the foundation of desire. Desire might develop later on, but at the stage where you have some kind of interest, desire might not be present.

The second object determining mental event is known as *conviction*, *mos-pa* in Tibetan. We have to make a distinction between conviction and faith. They are quite separate.

The text says that because we have observed certain events and have seen that certain things worked in the past, we develop conviction that they are going to work now. Faith is just accepting something as it is, without questioning. Conviction comes from critical inquiry, rather than acceptance of authority.

There is a passage that Buddhist teachers always recite. To translate it roughly, it means that Buddha said, "My teachings are like gold. They should be processed and reprocessed. Then, you accept them. Don't accept my teachings on authority."

So, Buddha said that you should accept his teachings on conviction, rather than faith. Conviction is something that comes along when you question the teachings, again and again.

Sometimes, after becoming a Buddhist, if we become doubtful about certain aspects of the teaching, we begin to feel guilty. "That I could doubt such things is impossible." But, as far as Buddhist teachings go, that sort of doubt is not regarded as some self-defeating procedure. It is used positively, in order to gain conviction, rather than ending up as a sceptic. Conviction comes along when we become convinced that something works or that what the teachings say is true.

The third mental event is known as *dran-pa*, which means *mindfulness*. Mindfulness, as we know, is connected with meditation. It just means we are able to observe our body, speech and mind. We begin to observe how we behave in those modes: how we behave physically, how we use our verbal ability, how we use our intellectual acumen. Mindfulness is also associated with past experiences. We begin to see how past experiences influence our present situations. We are able to make some connection between the two.

The fourth object-determining mental event is not something everyone experiences. It has to be cultivated. It's known as *ting-nge-'dzin* in Tibetan, which means *concentration*. We develop the ability of concentration in the context of meditation. It is not something that we can just experience occasionally, or experience in terms of our empirical mind.

In Tibet, especially, people thought meditation or developing concentration was just a matter of concentrating your mind on a particular object or on your breath alone, but the text says you could meditate upon real physical objects outside of you or on your mental processes.

There are four types of object that you can employ as an object of meditation.

The first one is connected with the body. If you are able to concentrate on your body, then you are able to see how your body behaves and how it operates, so you are able to purify your body properly. In other words, you are able to make a proper assessment of your bodily situations.

The second type is connected with emotions, which are internal. If you are able to concentrate on the emotions and just deal with them, one by one, then you are able to purify them, through development of concentration.

The third type of meditation is on the four *brahma-vihara*. *Brahma-vihara* means *temple of Brahma*, but here Brahma doesn't mean the Hindu god Brahma. It has a different connotation and is a psychological term that encompasses four types of mental processes. The first is love; the second, compassion; the third is joy and the fourth, equanimity.

Love and attachment are two different things. We could contemplate on love and we can generate love towards others, but we should not let love degenerate into attachment, which is a neurotic tendency. That can manifest in all kinds of crude or distorted forms of love.

Compassion is distinguished from sentimentality. If you are compassionate, then you could concentrate on that and generate compassion towards others. But if compassion becomes sentimentality, then the helper begins to suffer as much as the helpee, so both of you end up being neurotic. Compassion is healthy, but it could degenerate into sentimentality, where it begins to manifest as neurotic tendencies.

The third brahma-vihara is joy, and that is distinguished from elation. If you are able to do a few things for others, if you begin to benefit others, then you might

become elated, rather than joyful. If you're joyful, that is a healthy attitude, but if that degenerates into elation, then it produces further problems.

We are able to properly manage all these processes through equanimity, which is the fourth one. But equanimity could degenerate into apathy, where you begin to develop the attitude of total hopelessness or feel that you can't do anything at all. Equanimity is totally different. Equanimity comes from some kind of centredness, from some kind of balance. All the other brahma-vihara can be generated if some kind of balance and centredness is developed.

The fourth object of meditation is totally Buddhist. If you are able to concentrate and study the mind and mental events as they are set out in the Abhidharma texts, then that is regarded as an object of meditation as well. If we inquire about the mental events, how they operate, what Yogacara philosophy - in this case - says about mind and so on, if we become inquisitive about those things, then they become an object of meditation. So, even mental activity could become part of meditation.

Meditation doesn't necessarily imply sitting in a formal posture and watching the breath. Meditation could be connected either with a physical reference point or with a mental reference point. There is no contradiction between the two.

The fifth object-determining mental event is, again, said to be developed through cultivation. It is known as *shes-rab*. Shes-rab is intelligence, but it could, in some ways, be distinguished from the intellect or intellectual processes. Shes-rab is much more an inquisitiveness that exists. We might want to explore different things, we might want to study, but these activities are not just for the sake of studying. They are done to clarify confusion and dispel doubts about our own existence, as well as about the nature of the world. They don't become fruitless exercises, but become some kind of intelligent pursuit. That is shes-rab.

Shes-rab, literally, means *best of the intellect.* It is distinguished from intellectual pursuits of the normal kind, which might be just done for their own sake.

So, those are the five object determining events. We could have a discussion at this point.

Q: How does shes-rab relate to *lodro* and *rigpa*?

A: That's a good question.

Rigpa and lodro could both be some kind of ordinary intellectual pursuit. For instance, in Buddhism, studying metaphysics or logic might be regarded as shes-rab manifesting. But if you study other things, you could be a genius, but if your genius is expressed just for the sake of your being a genius, then it doesn't express your own state of existence. It could be a... - I don't know what the word is - ...mechanical expression of intelligence. Both lodro and rigpa could manifest like that.

But shes-rab is much more than that. It is inquisitiveness about your own existence, as well as the existence of the world. It's much more personal. It is concerned with clarifying doubts about yourself, doubts about the world. It's concerned with clarifying all those things. Shes-rab could develop out of lodro and rigpa. If you're intelligent, then shes-rab could develop out of that. Shes-rab is management of your own intelligence in a positive and wholesome kind of way.

Q: I'm not sure I understand the distinction between joy and elation.
A: Joy is much more persistent, but less exciting, in some ways. Elation could be emotionally satisfying on a temporary basis, but it's flippant. First, you think you've done a fantastic job, then you begin to doubt it. With joy, you feel good because you have generated love, compassion, whatever. But that doesn't make you feel too elated. There's a sense of well-being. Joy is really a basic sense of well-being. You are doing what you are doing, without expecting too much from the other side.

Q: Where does the notion of awareness, as opposed to mindfulness, fit in?
A: Awareness is connected with shes-rab, with intelligence, with the fifth object-determining event. In Buddhist meditation, we have sitting meditation, then we have analytical meditation. Analytical meditation is connected with analysing the world as well as yourself, through understanding Buddhist psychology and philosophy. You begin to question everything. You begin to look into every thing. So, it is connected with intelligence, in some ways.

Q: I understood that mindfulness was attention to something particular and that awareness was a broader view, where more of the environment was taken into meditation.
A: That's true. We could say that shes-rab and awareness are connected and awareness is the result of shes-rab. The more we are able to clarify everything, the more we are able to dispel doubts, then the more we will be able to see things in their proper perspective. Through analysis, we are able to free ourselves from traces and dispositions, so we are able to see things in their natural state. In Mahayana terms, it's called tathata, thatness, things as they are. *Seeing things as they are* means seeing things with fewer of the traces and dispositions, the way we are engrained to look at things in a particular way.

Awareness really develops when we are able to see things in their entirety, which we are normally unable to do. Our perception of the world is fragmented. So, we first begin to develop concentration, where we are able to drag our mind to a particular object. Then, awareness develops, where we are able to see things in a wider context, rather than being occupied with certain characteristics of an object and attributing characteristics that are not there in the object. That happens a lot in our perception of things.

Q: In ordinary situations, a person can be totally absorbed in their thoughts. You concentrate on one thing so much that you block out your whole environment. On the other hand, you might not be paying attention to what you're doing, and that's when you drop something or trip. Is that concentration?
A: Concentration is that there's some kind of continuity in our perception of the world.

Normally, we think about something, we're aware of something, and then our perception gets intercepted by something else. We're not mindful, so we lose our concentration. Concentration means we are able to direct our attention to a

particular object. There is some kind of unity in the way we see things. They are not fragmented.

Sometimes, clumsiness could be outcome of the loss of concentration. Those things are connected, in some ways. Traces and dispositions are not totally mental, they're physical as well. To observe how we're behaving and what sort of things are happening, on the physical level as well as on the mental level, would be part of meditation. The more we do that, the more insight we gain into our body and mind.

We don't have to rely on physiologists and psychologists to tell us how the body and mind work. We could have our own personal insight into the whole thing. In some ways, we might know more about our own body and mind than psychologists and physiologists, because they are only going to be studying our body from the outside. We are the ones experiencing our body. Making observations on someone else's body is a different thing.

Q: How does concentration differ from mindfulness.
A: Mindfulness is the technique and concentration is the result or outcome of that. The more mindful you are, the more concentrated you would be.

Q: Are love, compassion, joy and equanimity mental events?
A: Yes, they are mental events. They are included in one mental event: concentration. You can use them as objects of concentration. An object of meditation doesn't have to be physical, it could be mental. You could concentrate on love, on compassion, on all the rest, and if you see your love turning into attachment, or your joy turning into elation, that would be meditation, in itself. That is developing concentration. Normally, you fail to make those distinctions. If you are able to make a proper assessment of those things, then that would be meditation.

You don't need a physical object to concentrate upon, you can concentrate upon your own mental processes, especially the four brahma-vihara. Maybe the reason they are called brahma-vihara is because Buddhists wanted to say that those things are just as good as the temple of the Brahma. There's no explanation, besides something like that.

First, you generate love. You might generate love towards a particular person. Then, you concentrate on that love and make a proper assessment of it. If you concentrate on love, some person's image might come up. Any number of things can happen. You have to see whether the love is love or whether it's attachment, or what. You have to make a proper assessment of it, so these things would have some bearing on daily life as well.

Q: Is love the opposite of hate?
A: In this particular context, it is completely free from attachment, so it would be. But the thing is, if it turns into attachment, then it might manifest as all kinds of sadistic as well as masochistic impulses, which would be more connected with aggression than love.

Q: I understood that joy is not just a feeling of well-being, but it is also to feel well when others are feeling well, very similar to compassion.
A: In this context, if you think people should be confronted with happiness, then that would be love. But if you think sentient beings should be freed from suffering, that would be compassion.

Q: I understood that joy is the antidote to hatred and jealousy.
A: Joy is just a basic sense of well-being. It has to be contrasted with elation, which means you begin to feel good that you are able to help others, or that you are able to do this, that, and the other. You begin to feel elated about those things. But a feeling of elation brings depression, as well. So, you swing between the two. With joy, you are able to have a basic appreciation of what you are doing, but at the same time, you are not expecting too much out of the other person. You might do whatever you have to do to benefit others, so you just accept that. So, joy is contrasted with elation.

Equanimity would be the antidote to jealousy and hatred. With equanimity, you are balanced in your way of looking at the other person. You begin to learn how not to feel aggressive or jealous, you begin to become grounded through concentration and equanimity.

That's how it's defined: *nye ring tchag dhang, ni ring tange, tang din chimbu, nebu chhu chhu. Nye* means *those who are close to you*; *ring* means *those who are far away*, meaning enemies; tchag *means passion*, and *dhang* means *aggression.* So, you have passion for the people around you and aggression towards people who are far away from you. *Nyi den tawa* means *free from those two*; then *tang din chimbu* means the *great equanimity*. So, the great equanimity is the state where you're free from passion, aggression and jealousy.

Q: Can you explain how to use these four brahma-vihara?
A: You concentrate on your love. You could think, "I'm going to concentrate on love" or "I'm going to concentrate on compassion." You just see what comes into your mind. Then, you go on from there and see how you feel about the whole thing. If some image of a particular person comes up, you have to find out how you feel about him or her, how you respond to that. Is your response love or attachment? Is it sentimental or compassionate? What is the case?

Q: What's the difference between concentration and samadhi?
A: Samadhi is concentration. It's called ting-nge-'dzin in Tibetan. I just decided to use Tibetan terms throughout, rather than Sanskrit terms.

Q: I thought concentration was mindfulness, rather than samadhi.
A: Mindfulness is dran-pa. It's called *smrti* in Sanskrit.

Q: Is conviction only of a true thing, not like an opinion that's distorted by ego?
A: Yes, that's right.

Q: So everyone's conviction would have to be the same, in a way.

A: Yes. The thing is, conviction really comes from doing practice and study. So, you come to have more and more clarity. Things begin to fall into place. You just don't jump in and hope for the best, which is a kind of faith. With faith, you just jump in and then there's a paranoia against doubt, because you have a basic fear that something might be revealed to you that is going to repudiate your faith. But conviction is something that comes along in time.

Q: Opinion would be something that you haven't experienced or enquired of.
A: That's right. Even after you have undertaken a particular practice or study, you might go through all kinds of different opinions. Your conviction grows, despite the fact that your opinions are changing. The two are quite different. But opinions could produce conviction. You can't develop conviction without opinions. You do different things and then you begin to see this works, that works, this is true, that is true, and then you develop conviction.

The Eleven Healthy Mental Events

As I have already mentioned, certain mental events are regarded as being healthy and others are regarded as being unhealthy. Practice, in some sense, is oriented towards cultivating the healthy mental events and dispensing with the unhealthy ones. According to Abhidharma, eleven mental factors are regarded as being essential to Buddhist practice. Actually, they are regarded as being healthy. So, there are eleven healthy mental events.

The first one is known as *confidence-trust*. Sometimes people translate it as *faith*, but we must keep in mind that, in Buddhism, faith is not regarded as a premise from which you start off and then come to some conclusion. Faith is regarded as a conclusion, rather than as a premise. You develop confidence-trust through your practice, through study, rather than having faith right at the beginning and then get disappointed or begin to despair at some other stage.

Confidence-trust is divided into three subcategories. The first is known as *lucid confidence*. Lucid confidence is called *dang-b'ai dad-pa* in Tibetan. It is connected with the notion that we adopt certain procedures for practice and, having dealt with that, we begin to experience certain things and we begin to gain trust in our own practice. We begin to see the validity of the practice and, in some sense, the infallibility of the practice. We might make mistakes along the way, but the practice becomes more and more valid as we advance. So, lucid confidence begins to develop along with our practice.

The second subcategory is known as *trusting confidence - yid ches gyi dad-pa* in Tibetan. This type of trust is connected with the notion of karma. We experience it when, as we pay more attention to our daily situations and to our practice, we begin to see how the law of karma operates. Karma is no longer a Buddhist metaphysical concept. We discover how it really operates in every day life.

If you buy a shirt and the lady behind the desk makes a mistake in the accounting, you feel good, keep quiet, and walk out of the shop. Then, when you get in the car, you realise you've got a parking fine. So, you pay for it, sooner or later. This happens constantly.

So the law of karma is no longer a Buddhist metaphysical principle or some jargon that we use - "It's all karma". It begins to become personal and, sometimes, too painful, that such things are true, that karma actually operates in our every day life, constantly, all the time. So, we develop trust in it, obviously. It is really true, and so personal. This kind of trust is known as trusting confidence, yid ches gyi dad-pa.

The last subdivision of confidence-trust, known as *longing confidence* or *mngon 'dod gyi dad-pa*, is connected with the notion of the Four Noble Truths. First, we discover that there is suffering in the world. We experience it - otherwise we wouldn't begin to practice. There's this sense of suffering, so then we question the origin of suffering. We experience that as well and it dawns on us that there is a possibility of terminating this suffering. We discover that such things are actually possible. So, in some ways, we look forward to the path. From there, confidence begins to develop and we long for experiences that we have not yet had. Because the other descriptions of the Four Noble Truths have proved to be right, we have the inspiration to journey on. That's why it's called longing confidence.

There is a general sense of trust happening, at the same time. Normally, we trust something that brings pleasure or something of that sort, but the text says that developing confidence-trust doesn't necessarily bring any pleasure.

We have to make some distinction between the two situations.

If something brings about repeated pleasure, then we might have trust in that thing, but that is a bit naive. The author gives the example that we drink wine and it brings pleasure, but that does not necessarily produce trust. Or we might have pleasure in looking after our children, but we might not actually trust them. So, we have to make that kind of distinction.

Pleasure and what produces pleasure would not necessarily be objects of trust. On the other hand, we might trust something, but not like it. For instance, the more we meditate, the more we see the validity of the meditation. We begin to trust it, but we might not really like doing meditation. It's painful. But, there is some kind of trust that begins to develop through meditation.

So what we trust does not necessarily bring any kind of pleasure. Sometimes we could actually have both situations - trust as well as pleasure - and sometimes we might not have either. We might not have trust and we might not have any kind of pleasure. These sort of distinctions are quite important in terms of developing trust. Otherwise, we might get these things jumbled up and get confused.

The next of the eleven healthy mental events is known as *self-respect*. In Tibetan, it's called *ngo-tsha shes-pa*. Through self-respect, we are able to refrain from engaging in things that are totally disastrous for us. Through self-respect, we are able to uphold human dignity and not degenerate onto the level of animals. We begin to use our own personal judgment as a criterion for saying what we should get involved in and what we shouldn't get involved in. This sense of self-respect is totally necessary as a healthy component of spiritual practice. Through it, we are able to avoid circumstances that are harmful to us and we also cultivate things that are healthy for ourselves. These things can develop only if we have self-respect to begin with.

The third mental is known as *decorum*. In Tibetan, it's called *khrel yod-pa*. The difference between self-respect and decorum is the difference between public and private judgment. Decorum is related to public judgment. We do not engage in certain things, because people begin to despise us or might feel that what we are doing is detestable. Whatever may be the case, we use other people as the criterion for not engaging in things that are socially unacceptable. So, decorum makes us refrain from situations that are harmful towards others. In terms of self-respect, we are refraining from things that are harmful to ourselves.

The fourth mental event is known as *non-attachment*, which is called *ma chags-pa* in Tibetan. As the term implies, it's quite simple. Whatever takes place, there is a general sense of absence of attachment, of not hanging onto things. Things come and go and we are able to let go of them, rather than obsessively hanging onto them. There's some sense of guardedness.

The next mental event is known as *non-hatred*. It's called *zhe-sdang med-pa* in Tibetan. Again, this is quite straightforward. Non-hatred not only means that we should not go out feeling aggressive, but that we begin to give up any kind of destructive tendencies we have towards ourselves as well. Any kind of aggression is repudiated. So, there is a general sense of the absence of hatred.

The sixth mental event is *non-deludedness*, which is called *gti-mug med-pa*. Non-deludedness does not particularly mean that we become clever: it is just a general sense of wakefulness. We are able to see how karmic situations operate, how karmic law operates, and we begin to realise who we are and what we are. It's knowledge that we develop through spiritual practice, rather than any kind of technical knowledge that we might possess. So, gti-mug med-pa is a general sense of understanding of our practice and our development.

Next is *diligence*, which is called *brtson-'grus*. Diligence, in this case, does not necessarily mean that we begin to be diligent about practical things. It is diligence in terms of persevering with our practice or development. Even when we are confronted with obstacles of all kinds, we do not get disheartened. We persevere. It's said that diligence is associated with things that have to do with wholesomeness, rather than anything else. We might be diligent about going out to have our daily bar of chocolate or we might go out just to be in the rain, but that is not regarded as diligence. Diligence really means that we are able to persevere with meditation.

A lot of people think that, as soon as they sit down, their mind has to be calm and peaceful and, if it is so, then they feel good about it. But if they don't experience those things, then they think there is something wrong with them, rather than persevering with the situation. So, diligence is something of that sort. Obstacles might arise, but still, one has to persevere. Perseverance is connected with developing oneself. It is said that the definition of diligence is being diligent about upgrading oneself or cultivating what is called wholesome.

The eighth mental event is known as *alertness* or *shin-tu sbyangs-pa*. Alertness is divided into two: *alertness of body* and *alertness of mind*. It is the opposite of laziness. We do not just crouch in a corner like a bag of potatoes. Even physically, there is some sense of wakefulness taking place - which is called *lus kyi shin sbyangs*. In Tibetan, *lus* is *body*. It is as simple as that. It is said that if we begin to let our body rot, if we really become slack, we have to clean it up.

As far as mind is concerned, it's the same thing. *Shin sbyangs* or *alertness* makes our mind much more lucid. It is the opposite of sluggishness. That's *sems kyi shin sbyangs*, alertness of the mind.

Synchronisation of body and mind begins to take place. Things are taken care of on a daily situation, and we are quite alert.

The next mental event is called *concern* or *bag yod*. When people say someone is observant or perceptive, bag yod is something like that. We begin to become quite sensitive towards different situations and towards other people's viewpoints. We don't become too dogmatic about our own viewpoint. We can sympathise with others, rather than putting our own viewpoint down their throats. We are able to be open on that level and also be aware of other people's needs and demands.

The tenth mental event is known as *equanimity*, which we have discussed in relation to meditation. It's called *btang-snyoms*. Equanimity is the antidote to elation and depression. Normally, we might feel excited about certain things and then, if bad news is brought to us, we immediately feel depressed. Equanimity just means that we are able to relate to things in a much more stable manner.

It's said that we could develop equanimity through paying attention to a particular object, not viewing that object as being beautiful or ugly, but just

looking at it as an object. We develop that mental attitude and then extend it into other areas of our life. Equanimity is, in some sense, regarded as being the foundation from which we develop all the other positive mental events.

The eleventh mental event is *non-violence*, which is called *rnam-par mi 'tshe.* Non-violence not only means not killing insects or animals, but is related with not having any kind of aggression. Whatever situations we might be in, whatever situations we might be confronted with, we are able to accept them as they are, without becoming resentful. We don't look for a scapegoat, we don't blame anything. We just relate to a situation as it is. Cultivation of gentleness and humbleness are associated with this particular mental event.

Instead of going on, we should stop at this particular point, because one section is over.

If you have any questions, you are welcome.

Q: You translated shin sbyangs as alertness. In samatha teachings, it's translated as *thoroughly processed.* Is that the same thing?
A: Thoroughly processed is a literal translation. *Shin sbyangs* literally means *thoroughly processed. Shin* means *thoroughly, sbyangs* means *processed.*

But it means alertness, that you're not so bogged down that you don't know what's going on around you. There's a general sense of wakefulness, where you are able to see what's happening. It applies to body, as well as to mind.

That's why we can meditate by lying on the floor or with our feet up in the air. Sitting the way that we do is regarded as totally human. Animals can do all kinds of things, but they can't sit on a cushion like human beings. In some ways, it's as simple as that. With your spine straight and with your body placed in a particular posture, you feel more dignified and more wakeful. Mind is associated with that as well, so your mind begins to become more lucid, too. When you're tired, your body becomes heavy and your arms begin to hang, your shoulders droop, and all the rest of it. If you are able to develop alertness of body, then you would be able to hold your posture better, even in normal circumstances. That would be a sign of the development of alertness of the body. Alertness is not purely mental, but is also physical, which is really quite interesting.

Q: Is alertness developed through sitting practice?, People who do things like aerobics and jogging have really good posture. Is that the same sort of thing?
A: In some ways, that has got something to do with it, but the thing is, you do not develop alertness with any kind of extreme basis. You develop mental alertness, as well as physical alertness. That's a really important point. You just don't develop your physical side, you also develop your mental side.

Q: Is accepting a situation as it is, without becoming resentful, the end result of processing an aggressive attitude? Is that the final result of one's practice?
A: That's right. Sometimes people think that, from the moment they're born, the world owes them something. They feel that they have come into the world to collect debts. It might not be such an extreme case, but we feel resentful of all kinds of things. Sometimes we might think, "Why should I be in this situation?" We look for scapegoats, for some kind of reason, but we are unable to accept the

situation as it is. Non-violence really means being able to accept the situation. And it's not just about not producing painful situations for others. It's also about not producing painful situations for yourself. That's another aspect.

Normally, when we talk about non-violence, we're talking about not creating harmful situations for others, but we don't think about it in terms of ourselves. Non-violence applies to ourselves, as much as to others. If you are creating harmful situations towards yourself, if you are creating a situation where you're suffering, then you are not able to have a non-violent attitude. If you can't accept the situation that you're in, then you are creating a difficult situation for yourself, which is related to resentment towards the whole thing. You might begin to resent yourself, you might begin to resent the situation, you might begin to resent other people. All those things get inter-related. With the non-violent attitude, you accept the situation that you're in, you accept other situations as well, and your own perception of it, too.

Q: You might feel you've been wronged and you want to strike back, so you put yourself into a situation where you could become attacked. Seeing the situation as it is seems to relate to after you've become involved in a situation.
A: That's right. If you are not involved in the situation, how could you see it as it is? You have to be involved in a particular situation when you begin to look at it properly. The thing is, if you can accept that fact, then that's good. That's what facts are. Facts mean that's how it is, there's nothing you can do about it. You have to just relate to it as being fact. You don't try to change it or expect something else to happen.

Q: What do you mean? If something happens to you, you can let the situation go and just leave it as it is, or you can try and change it?
A: Certain situations are like that, but there are other situations that you have absolutely no control over. For instance, if you are born as a white Australian and you resent that fact, there is nothing you can do. You are stuck with it. You are put into that situation and that's a fact. If you are unable to accept it, then you are only going to have more problems, rather than solve anything.

Q: In terms of these eleven mental events, I can't find anything where you can look at a situation and take positive action out of it.
A: They are all oriented towards action, because it's not good enough to have an attitude and not implement it. As far as Buddhists are concerned, your intention and your action have to be coordinated all the time. You can't just have an intention and not implement it, or just act arbitrarily without making a proper assessment of your action. Those two things have to go together. All these mental events are both intentional as well as action oriented.

Q: So, in a given situation, you could be cultivating a lot of these qualities through one action?
A: That's right.

Q: I don't see that as a mental event. To me, this is more like developing character.
A: Mental events could be either healthy or unhealthy. They're not all oriented towards building up character. Maybe the positive mental events are related towards making you a better person or being able to relate to situations in a much more positive manner, but there are other mental events that are not that way at all. There are unhealthy mental events. *Mental event* really means *any mental process*. *Mental event* does not mean anything dramatic. If you feel like going out to have a cup of coffee, that would be a mental event, too.

Q: To me, these eleven things are attitudes brought to bear on mental events. I'm having trouble understanding why they are called mental events.
A: An attitude would be a mental event, too. That's the thing. An attitude itself would be a mental event. *Event* means it is taking place in a particular, temporary duration. That mental process has some kind of temporary duration. That's what *event* implies. You have this mental process that lasts for a certain period of time and you happen to be concerned with it in that given situation. That is what a mental event is.

You could regard these things as positive attitudes, but positive attitudes themselves would be mental events, because when you have adopted a attitude, it takes place in a given context and in a particular, temporary situation. That attitude would last for a period of time, so it is a mental process that occupies a particular, temporary duration. That's why they are called mental events.

Q: If you're experiencing a non-violent attitude to something, while you're experiencing that feeling, that is the mental event?
A: Yes, that's right.

Q: Is it possible for all these mental events to be brought to bear simultaneously on a situation?
A: That is a possibility that we might be able to achieve, but at the beginning I don't think we could have all these mental events taking place at the same time, no. It's a matter of cultivation. Normally, we might be concerned with one thing or another. We might experience more than one mental event at most, but we wouldn't experience all of them at once, which really demands a tremendous capacity.

Q: Does every situation have the potential for all the mental attitudes to operate?
A: I think so, because there is a kind of family resemblance, or whatever you want to call it. If you learn how to drive an old, beaten up Holden, you would have a better chance for being able to drive a Mercedes. Once you have learned how to drive, then it doesn't matter whether you're driving an automatic or manual. You are able to relate to those things. In a similar way, if you have developed a particular mental event which happens to be positive, then you would have a better chance of venturing into the others as well, whereas if you haven't really developed any mental event, then you would have less chance of getting familiar with all the other ones. All the positive mental events are inter-related. They are not

independent of each other. Still, you need to get familiar with each one. Realising one would not necessarily make you realise the others, but if you have realised one, it would enhance your understanding of the others.

Q: With decorum, is there a danger in trusting too much what is socially acceptable?
A: Yes. That's why self-respect is mentioned. The Buddhist ethical attitude is quite valid. There is a middle view or middle path expressed here. We can't just go along with everyone else, like a sheep, and follow everything that others do. But at the same time, we can't become too individualistic and tread on everyone else's toes. There has to be some kind of balance between the two. You uphold your self-respect, as well as considering social demands. That's why personal interest and social interest are mentioned. You don't give up your interest just for society and you don't uphold your interest in spite of social interest.

Q: What's socially acceptable often seems to be related to illusions of reality. I suppose that's where asserting your own views of reality comes in.
A: Yes. But if you become too individualistic, then it doesn't matter how much you pronounce your views, no one is going to listen to you anyway. So, you're wasting your breath. But if you are able to adapt to a situation and comply with certain social criterion, what you say is going to have a lot more bearing. It's really practical advice.

Q: Is longing confidence equated with the longing for God in the Christian or Hindu religions?
A: In this particular context, longing really means.... It's as if we have discovered the two noble truths of suffering and the origin of suffering. First, we know that we suffer, then we get into some kind of practice and we begin to learn why we suffer. Because we experience that, we then see the possibility of terminating that whole process. The path becomes much more of a reality and we long for it. That's what longing confidence really means. We are not longing for something unrealisable. We are longing for something that is realisable, so there's some confidence and trust involved in it. And that's related with the fourth noble truth, in some sense. You are not longing for God, you are longing for the possible experience that you could have. That possible experience is not a fantasy. You realise that, since you have experienced the other noble truths, then the fourth one becomes even more of a reality, rather than a fantasy of some sort. Trust begins to develop in terms of the possible experience that you could have.

Q: I'm wondering about non-violence. In defending my garden, I kill snails. Other people might have to defend people, and they hurt some other thing. What's the karma of that?
A: That's a delicate question. Killing snails would have some karmic value, but with the other stuff, it's a really dicey question. From a Mahayana point of view, if your intention is totally impeccable, then there would not be much of a problem.

For instance, if someone was going to commit a massacre and you happen to know that, if you kill that person before they commit that crime, it would assume a totally different complexion. It's not the same as killing the people.

So, from a Mahayana point of view, you could do certain things, but you don't do them for selfish reasons. You don't have ulterior motives.

Q: But you think the snails are more important?
A: It's not that the snails are more important, but the garden is not more important than the snails, either. The snails have as much right to live as the garden, so to speak. Normally, what people would do is just pick them up and take them somewhere else.

Q: I thought that was mean, because it gives someone else the problem. I just put them out and birds will come. Maybe that's better.
A: What the birds do is totally the birds' responsibility. It's something that the snails and the birds have to negotiate about. Just pick them up and take them to places, like where a house has been pulled down, or vacant lots, and throw them there.

Q: Could you clarify the difference between non-hatred and non-violence?
A: They are inter-related, but I think non-hatred is related more to external circumstances, while non-violence is related to both your own situation as well as situations that other people are involved in. It's difficult, because in English they are almost identical, but hatred would have a stronger meaning in Tibetan. Inflicting pain onto others would come under hatred, taking vengeance, things like that. Hatred would be much more destructive. A Buddhist would say that with hatred you have an intention, whereas if you're just wandering around the street getting bored and you knock off a parking meter or put a hole in a road sign, you're being violent arbitrarily. From a karmic point of view, doing something with intention would have much more bearing than just going around doing different violent things arbitrarily.

Q: Disappointment is often connected with hatred or violence. If you get into thinking of self-respect, it can come in as a counteracting force, rather than keeping on with the hatred.
A: Yes, that's right. Self-respect really covers all kinds of ground. It could make you feel more dignified in certain situations. Because you respect your situation, your own perception of the whole thing, you don't jump up and down because certain situations are taking place around you. You don't feel that you are getting undermined by situations, so that you despair.

The Six Unhealthy Mental Factors

We have discussed the healthy or positive mental factors that are necessary for the development of spiritual practice. The subject matter that is going to principally concern us now is the unhealthy attitudes and mental events that we possess. They are known as the six basic unhealthy mental events.

The first one is *desire*, and it's called *'dod-chags* in Tibetan. Desire, in a Buddhist context, means that we aspire towards something that we do not possess. It doesn't matter what it is. We might aspire towards being something that we are not, and that would be desire, or we might want to possess certain material comforts, and that would be desire as well.

Buddhists would say that desire cannot be, if the desire is fulfilled. If we are happy about certain situations, then there wouldn't be desire. Desire means there is some kind of lack. Which is actually intrinsic to human situations. When we realise that there is some kind of lack within us, then we begin to have desire. If we feel good about ourselves or if we feel good about our material situations, then there would be no desire.

Desire creates emotional instability. We feel that, "If I was such and such a person, I could feel so good. I would be so fantastic." But that sort of situation doesn't arise as long as we have desire. As soon as we begin to attain that particular stage, we want something more.

So, desire is intrinsic to human situations and is regarded as a basic human emotion or a basic unhealthy mental event that we possess.

It is said that the reason we should not have desire is not because desire in itself is particularly bad, but because desire produces frustration. The moment we desire some other situation, we begin to experience frustration. That is why desire is regarded as an unhealthy mental event.

The second unhealthy mental event is known as *aggression*. It's called *khong-khro* in Tibetan. Aggression really refers to any kind of restlessness that we might experience. It can manifest in all kinds of situations. It might not be a gross form of aggression, such as wanting to wring your neighbour's neck, because he disposed of his garbage in your backyard. It could manifest in a more sophisticated way.

Whenever you feel that you've been given the wrong end of the stick, then you feel restless and aggressive. There could be a restless mentality, that "It isn't fair." If we become generous and open with someone and that person turns his back on us, we feel that it's not fair. We say, "It's not fair. Why has he done this to me?" All kinds of little irritations begin to manifest. That is really subsumed under the category of aggression.

We might not realise that we are being aggressive. We might think it justified that we feel that way. "This person has not acknowledged my compassion, my sympathy, so I am betrayed. I'm justified in proclaiming my depression. I'm justified in proclaiming my despair." But that type of proclamation in itself becomes an expression of aggression. So, that is the second basic human emotion, or basic unhealthy mental event.

The third one is known as *nga-rgyal* in Tibetan, *arrogance* in English. We think that we are better than someone else. We come into the world thinking that

the world owes us something. We come into the world to collect some kind of debt that is due us. We come into the world as a tax collector. This kind of arrogance happens constantly. It is a basic arrogance that human beings possess.

There are seven types of arrogance that can manifest, according to Yogacara psychology. That is the first one, which is quite basic. Everyone feels that ego is a necessary component of being a human being, and this has been developed into all kinds of psychological and philosophical theories, but it is a basic human instinct that when we are not acknowledged, when we are ignored, we feel that our debt is not paid. We feel that people owe us something, but they want to ignore this situation. This is regarded as the first type of arrogance.

The second type is known as *excessive arrogance*, or *lhag-pa'i nga-rgyal.* This means that not only do we feel that people owe us something, but we begin to lay trips on others, as they say. We begin to encroach upon others' privacy and territory. We express our arrogance in terms of "How could you ignore me? Why can't you acknowledge my existence?" We make a move and set up some kind of strategy towards how we could best manipulate someone. We take interest in one or another medium through which we could do that properly, so that people could finally realise how fantastic we are. We might try to express it through poetry, through art, through all kinds of things like that. Since people can't acknowledge our existence, we come up with some trick, some medium, through which we manipulate other people's sensitivity and we say, "Look how fantastic I am. Look at my ability, look at my intelligence." All kinds of things like that begin to crop up. That is known as excessive arrogance, according to Yogacara psychology.

The third one is known as the *pride of excessive arrogance* or *nga rgyal las kyang nga-rgyal.* This is becoming totally psychotic. You try to express your arrogance through art or poetry or psychology, but no matter what medium you have chosen, it does not work. So, you become totally frustrated and go berserk, because people cannot relate to what you are trying to express. As a result, you begin to become psychotic. Excessive arrogance turns into the arrogance of arrogance, a further development of the previous one.

The fourth type is known as *egoism,* and is called *nga'o synam-pa'i nga-rgyl.* Egoism is, in some ways, less psychotic than the ones that we have been talking about. It is really related to the five psychophysical constituents, the five skandhas.

We think, "This is me." If someone says, "Who are you?", you might say, "Well, I'm Jane", and if they persist, you might say, "I'm what I consist of. What are you talking about?"

There is some kind of identification of being who we are, referring to our psychophysical constituents. There is a basic sense of egoism, which relates to the first arrogance, actually. There isn't really very much difference between the two. It might just be that we have much stronger feelings towards the psychophysical constituents.

The fifth one is called *arrogance of showing off, mngon-pa'i nga-rgyal.* Arrogance of showing off is related to some kind of competition. If someone is a good poet or a good musician, we want to prove that we are better. It's quite straightforward. It might also involve some kind of bad taste. Sometimes, we exhibit too much of our wealth or ability. We begin to become ostentatious. We try to prove too much. We try to show off so much that the whole thing turns into a

big joke. We want to impress others, but they are not impressed at all. They class you as having bad taste. They think that you have done something, but it is totally off the mark.

The sixth one is *arrogance of thinking small*. In Tibetan, it's called *cung-zad snyam-pa'i nga-rgyal*. It literally means *arrogance of thinking small*, which is quite interesting.

In the West, being arrogant means thinking that you are so wonderful, so fantastic, because you happen to possess so many material things or certain talents, but in Buddhism, even to think that you are small, that you are pathetic, becomes a kind of arrogance. A lot of people actually come across like that. They come up with all kinds of ego mechanisms whereby they express their arrogance through being helpless. "I'm so pathetic. Would you please come and help me? I'm just desperate, I'm so bad." The whole thing becomes another expression of arrogance. If you think, "I'm just a speck of dust, I get swayed this way and that way because of other people's influence. I'm nothing", then that becomes another expression of egocentricity or arrogance.

I think that a very important aspect is expressed here. As far as Western psychology is concerned, arrogance always involves thinking that you are terrific. If you do not think you are terrific, then you are not egocentric, so they say, "You are fantastic, feel egocentric about yourself". But Buddhists would say that if we think we are pathetic, then still, we are being egocentric, because that is another means we have adopted of drawing people's attention towards us so that we could live on their sympathy. We nurture our own ego through living on the feedback that we receive through other people's sympathy and compassion. Whatever we receive begins to solidify that type of attitude, so it is regarded as arrogance as well.

The seventh type is called *perverted arrogance*, *log-pa'i nga-rgyal*. Perverted arrogance does not particularly imply any kind of perversion in the usual sense. It does not mean that you have weird sexual preferences or anything like that. Perverted arrogance really involves lack of understanding.

We have all kinds of mistaken notions about what we are. We are totally confused, so we choose to make up who we are. We form a philosophy about ourselves, as to who we are and what we are. It might be totally wrong, totally mistaken, but that particular attitude comes about due to lack of awareness, which is called *ma-rig-pa* in Tibetan. *Ma* is a negative prefix and *rig-pa* is *awareness*, so *ma-rig-pa* means *lack of awareness*.

Bad philosophies come about because we do not know what we are, so we come up with all kinds of answers as to what we are. We say, "I'm like this because of this, that and the other," but we have no intrinsic understanding of why it is so, why we are like this, or what we really are, so all kinds of mixed feelings and mixed attitudes begin to develop.

The next unhealthy mental event that we are going to discuss is known as *opinionatedness*, *lta-ba*. Opinionatedness is divided into five.

The first, which is connected with the five psychophysical constituents, is known as *opinionatedness regarding the perishable constituents*: *'jig-lta*. We look at our psychophysical constituents and feel that they are what we consist of, so we form all kinds of philosophical notions about that. Even though the psychophysical

constituents may be perishable and mutable, we might think they are not mutable at all, or they are totally mutable and are not going to exist in future lives. We form all kinds of philosophical notions about that particular concept, and that is known as opinionatedness about what is perishable.

The second one is known as *opinionatedness regarding the extremes*. In Tibetan, it's called *mthar-lta*. Due to the previous notion about the psychophysical constituents, we begin to form the notion that we either exist eternally into the future - which is eternalism - or that we perish in this life - which is a nihilistic or materialistic attitude. These two attitudes are regarded are opinionatedness of the extremes.

Thinking that we are going to live forever is an opinion, rather than knowledge of some kind. If I may say so, Plato made a distinction between opinion and knowledge. He said that a lot of people mix the two, so having an opinion is equated with having knowledge. But to equate knowledge with opinion is totally wrong. Knowledge cannot be contradicted by anyone. Once you have attained knowledge, that is it. No one can contradict that. But if you have an opinion, someone can come up with a better one. Your opinion gets undermined, because someone else is more clever than you. But if you have attained knowledge, then that is immutable, in that sense.

In some ways, the Buddhist contention is the same thing. If we feel that we live eternally or that we cease to exist at the time of death, both these things are really opinion, rather than knowledge, because we do not know. We do not know whether we exist eternally or whether we cease to exist at the time of death. There is no knowledge at all. We might have speculations about this sort of thing, but speculation involves opinions. So, through reasoning, our opinion might be proved to be totally wrong and we get suspended in the air, from that point of view.

The third type is known as *obsession with a particular opinion*, and that is called *lta-ba mchog 'dzin* in Tibetan. Obsession with a particular opinion is quite straightforward, actually. It means that to even think that your philosophical opinion or viewpoint is superior to someone else's is regarded as totally devastating, in some sense. You might think that being a vegetarian makes your body healthy, but another person might think that eating steaks three times a day is good. Whatever type of opinion we might have, whether it is philosophical or practical, thinking that our opinion is better than anyone else's is known as obsession with a particular opinion.

All kinds of dogmas and political theories develop from this. Communism, fascism, socialism, all develop from this type of opinionatedness. We think our opinion is far better than any other opinion. You might think that Buddhists have the answer, so when Hindus talk about atma, you want to sacrifice your life in order to uphold the notion of selflessness. But such a notion is regarded as an obsession with a particular view or opinion.

The fourth one is known as *obsession with ideologies concerning ethical issues*: *tshul-khrims dang zhugs-mchog 'dzin*.

The Jains walk around naked and roll in the dust, sometimes they bark like a dog. Some would pierce their tongues and go through all kinds of austere practices, and they might regard that as being ethical. Others might say that you should totally uphold some libertine attitude and indulge in all kinds of things.

From Buddhist point of view, these two types of ethical attitudes would be kinds of obsession, rather than real ethical practices. We might propagate certain ethical issues that would be related to sadistic or masochistic attitudes. There are ascetics who destroy their body. They poke out their eyeballs, put nails through their tongue. Those actions would not be related to ethics, because they do not benefit the person or anyone else, so they are regarded as an obsession with ideologies concerning ethical issues and are not related with ethical issues at all. *Tsul-khrims* actually means *ethics*, and *dang zhugs* is *self-torture* or masochistic practice of any kind. In this particular category, they are classed as being the same.

The fifth type is *wrong* or *perverted opinion*, and is called *log-lta* in Tibetan. The text gives the example of purusa and prakti. In a Hindu school known as Samkhya, purusa is the consciousness aspect and prakti is the material aspect. But any speculation is regarded as wrong view.

As soon as we venture out of whatever we experience, it begins to become some kind of perverted or wrong view.

It is important to realise that Buddhists have never speculated about what happens when one attains nirvana or what the nature of nirvana is or what happens to the Buddhas after nirvana. The moment we speculate about those things, that speculation becomes opinion, rather than knowledge, because we do not know. So, why bother inquiring after those things? It's better to relate to whatever we experience and make a proper assessment of that, rather than spend time thinking about what we do not experience. This is regarded as being of paramount importance. So, to speculate about what we do not experience - what nirvana is or what nirvana is not, how Buddha exists after nirvana, whether Buddhas eat chocolates or have the urge to go to the movies after they've attained enlightenment - is totally ludicrous, as far as Buddhists are concerned.

In fact, all kinds of questions were put to the Buddha about these things, and Buddha said he didn't have any answer. Not because he didn't know, but because to speculate about those things does not help.

If you have eaten pizza, but no one else could, then to talk about pizza to someone who can never taste it is totally ludicrous. Buddha said these questions would only form wrong opinions, rather than right ones. So, speculation can be equated with wrong opinion - log-lta.

That really comes to the end of the list, in some sense. We could actually go on and on, but most of the other lists are actually interwoven with what we have already discussed.

Q: What about five and six? You said there are six basic unhealthy mental events. What are the other two?

A: Jealousy and ignorance would be the other two, actually.

Jealousy, which is called *phrag-dog*, is having some kind of competitive feeling, having some kind of restless feeling. If someone possesses something better than you, then you want to possess it. This could manifest on the spiritual level as well. When people inquire about what sort of practice you are doing, practice they are unable to, they might feel that they are left out or that someone is doing better than them. All kinds of things take place on this level. Phrag-dog is

really any kind of competitive feeling, wishing that you were better than someone else, because you discover that there is someone else who is better than you.

Ignorance, at this point, is the most important aspect. Ignorance is known as *gti-mug* in Tibetan, *avidya* in Sanskrit. Gti-mug doesn't particularly mean that we are uneducated, that we can't put two and two together. In fact, if you present some kind of complex mathematical formula to a Buddhist master, I'm sure he would be baffled. Gti-mug, at this point, really means a basic sense of bewilderment: not knowing about our own situation of what we are, lack of understanding of ourselves and other people, not being able to make a proper assessment of the whole situation on that level. Gti-mug really amounts to not being able to coordinate feeling, intellect and intuition, not being able to really coordinate between our different capacities of perception. One thing predominates another, there is no harmony between our intellect, intuition and feeling. That's what gti-mug is.

So, those are the six basic emotions. We've been going into a bit more detail than is normally presented. Normally, Buddhists might just say we should give up ego, or desire, or opinion, whatever. In the early Buddhist teachings, Buddha spent a lot of time talking about opinions, saying people should give up their opinions about different things.

Q: You went into much detail about the different aspects of arrogance and opinionatedness. Surely, aggression also has many different levels.

A: I did not say very much, because there are no categories there. Aggression can manifest in all kinds of ways. It's not that you want to knock someone off, because they happened to stop at a traffic light and didn't keep moving, it could be more sophisticated. You could have aggression towards yourself, for instance.

Normally, when we talk about aggression, we always think in terms of having aggression towards someone else, but there are all kinds of aggression that manifest in terms of ourselves. So, aggression has a lot of levels, both gross and subtle.

A Buddhist would say aggression is obvious, so you do not have to talk about it very much. Something like desire would be much more subtle, so you have to concentrate on that a great deal. When you feel aggressive, you immediately feel your physical responses and your mental attitude. You can't miss it. If you have desire, it's much more subtle and takes a while for you to actually realise that that is what's happening. A lot of the time, you begin to realise what has happened after it has happened. That sort of thing is much more subtle, so a Buddhist would say that you have to pay more attention to it.

It's very difficult, especially if you become a Buddhist, for you not to realise aggression, but desire would come along even on a spiritual level: wanting to achieve something and not being satisfied with whatever you have achieved. When you first start meditating, you might find it very difficult even to sit, let alone mind the rest, but once you begin to become comfortable with your physical posture, then you want to achieve something else. This continues all the time, and it can manifest in a spiritual as well as a material sense.

Q: You were saying that wrong or perverted opinion is when you speculate about the nature of things, rather than concentrate on discovering what is the nature of things. Would that be right?
A: Yes. Opinions are related to giving interpretations, especially in terms of interpretations of speculation. Buddhists give interpretations, but opinions are mostly related with speculation as to what might happen in the realms of things that are totally extrinsic to our experience. What might happen in the state of nirvana? What might happen when someone attains Buddhahood? Might you continue to live eternally after your death, or might you not live after death? To say that you are finished when your body is decomposed would be speculation. Do you know? You don't know. Even the person who is dying would not know, so that would be speculation as well.

Q: Wouldn't the belief that there is a state of nirvana also be speculation?
A: No, because nirvana is defined as the cessation of suffering.

Q: But if you are interested in the path, you have faith that there is a goal, that there is a state of cessation of suffering. It seems to me that that's speculative, because we don't know that. We just hope.
A: No, I think that's different. We don't know what happens after nirvana, but we know what happens up to nirvana, and the testimony of the people who have attained nirvana bears out the fact that nirvana is possible. Buddhas and the other Buddhist masters have propounded the fact that such things are possible, and they have given examples of how it is realisable. It's not in the realm of the possible, but in the realm of certainty, in some sense.

But we can't speculate about what happens after nirvana. When the Buddha dies, what happens to him? There's no Buddha to tell you what has happened. Buddhist masters, after they have passed away, cannot tell you what has happened to them. To speculate about that would be totally ridiculous, because there is no public testimony that would prove whether they exist or do not exist.

You can read Buddha's original works and see what he says about this. He says that what you should do is try to relieve your suffering, instead of worrying about whether you will be existing eternally in the future. You might end up being neurotic in a future life, so you should make sure you don't become so neurotic, rather than thinking about eternity or not existing. All those things would be really speculative, in some sense.

Opinion is called *drishti* in Sanskrit and in Pali it's called *ditthi*. *Samma-ditthi* means *right view*, but that's part of the eightfold path, and Buddha spent a lot of time on that as well. That's where Buddhism can be distinguished from other religious traditions.

In Christianity, God created the world out of nothing. You have this world, you have heaven, and when you die you go to heaven and you live there eternally, if you have managed your affairs properly. If you haven't, then you're doomed forever. In most of the Hindu traditions also, you possess a soul and you live eternally in whatever form you exist. Buddhists would say that there's no guarantee.

Q: Wouldn't the Hindu also say that that is not speculative, but it's been shown by living or previous masters who have attained that state of atma?
A: That's right, but still, what they talk about is what they have realised. They might have come to the cessation of suffering, they might enjoy a certain kind of bliss, but they have not shown that they can exist for eternity. How have they shown it? They have just talked about it. It is possible, but how do we know? Once they die, there is no testimony that that is so.

Buddhism lies between strict materialism and strict religious tradition, and I think people should realise this. Buddha has never said that you could exist eternally, even as a Buddha, and he did not say that you stop existing after you have realised that samsara is futile, either.

Q: How do we know a Buddha is a Buddha?
A: Because he has realised the cessation of samsara. That's the whole point.

Q: But how do we know that?
A: Because we have seen it. Buddha is not just Sakyamuni Buddha. In Hinduism you might talk about Krishna, in Christianity you might talk about Jesus Christ, but in the Buddhist tradition any realised being would be Buddha. Buddha doesn't mean Sakyamuni Buddha, Buddha could be anyone. In Zen tradition Dogenzenji, or anyone for that matter, would be a Buddha.

The term *buddha* really means *being enlightened,* so any enlightened being would be Buddha, from this point of view. Buddha does not refer to a particular being, as Krishna or Jesus does. Being Jesus means being a particular person, whereas being a Buddha does not mean being that. Sakyamuni Buddha died two thousand five hundred years ago, but what he realised can be realised by anyone. That's the whole point, that is what's being talked about.

Q: But until I have realised that, I have no idea what it is that Buddhas have realised.
A: In some ways, we have talked about that. Buddha was a really systematic teacher. He said that at first you don't have to realise anything, just find out whether your life consists of suffering or not. Find that out, and then find out where the suffering comes from. How much are other people responsible for it, how much are you responsible for it? Find out the origin of suffering and, after that, you could come to the realisation that suffering can end. Only then can you embark on the path.

So, it's a gradual thing. You don't have to speculate about it. To realise it, you do not have to speculate about whether Buddha exists or not, or whether enlightened beings exist in this world at the moment. You just find out what you experience, whether you suffer or not. And, if you realise you suffer, then you find out where the suffering comes from. Once you begin to realise that, then you try to find out how the suffering can be stopped. That's the genius of the Buddha. Buddha never bothered to dangle a carrot in front of us, saying, "If you follow me, everything is going to be all right". It's left totally up to us, but in a very pragmatic

way. If we follow a certain procedure, then it is up to us to realise how those procedures take place.

Q: You desire, because you haven't acquired something that someone else has. But there are many people who are happy, or who appear to be happy, because they haven't seen anything better.
A: I think that's the whole point of the deception that people suffer from. That's what deception means, thinking you are happy. But how are they happy? They are not happy at all. Actually, even here, there are people who have two cars, a yacht at the back, they can afford to go to Bali once every year, but they're not happy. Instead of having a Holden, they want something else. They want to change that yacht to something else. Instead of going to Bali, they want to go somewhere else. Instead of having a particular business enterprise, they want to do something else. All kinds of things come up.

Just to think that everything is okay really does not help, because desire is still there. Desire means wanting to change from the existing situation to something else. There would be a lot of people who do not want to know about spirituality. They're happy the way they are, from a spiritual point of view, but they are not happy in an overall situation. They still want to constantly improve themselves. The more they achieve, the more they want to achieve, so it's a vicious circle. That's what desire means, from a Buddhist point of view. It's not desire for spirituality. In fact, a desire for spirituality would be much more positive.

Q: I was reading in *The Three Pillars of Zen* about the motivation in zazen to work through conflict, to get to that other reality that we just have faith does exist. So, desire can be used positively.
A: Yes. As I said, a spiritual desire is much more positive than a material desire. But the thing is, once you begin to do that, then, from a Buddhist point of view, you don't really need desire at all.

You already possess Buddha-nature. You are already rich and wealthy inside, so why desire anything? In fact, the more you can be that, the more you're going to be able to realise it. But, at the beginning, you have to make that journey, because you need to break through the deception that you suffer from.

A lot of people try to be the way they are. In all kinds of circumstances, they think they are what they are, but they suffer from all kinds of deceptions. To be able to break through that, you have to have some kind of spiritual aspiration. But once you embark on that, then you begin to realise that you don't really need to aspire for anything, which is a realisation that comes afterwards, after aspiring for it. You really don't need to aspire for it, because you already possess so much wealth and dignity within you. To try to aspire for something that's much more dignifying, or whatever is the case, is really ludicrous, because if you try to borrow something from outside you, you're going to lose it. As they say, borrowed money is no money. Spiritual realisation really has to come from within, and whatever comes from within is what you already possess, so the question of aspiration would not apply, from some stage.

Q: So any desire connected with attachment has to be negative, even if it's attachment to some concept, to an idea?
A: I think so, yes. When we look at attachment and desire, I think that, in some ways, desire would be more positive than attachment. Attachment means hanging onto something and not letting go, whereas desire means aspiring towards something that you don't possess. Desire implies lack, and you try to achieve that, whereas attachment means that you possess something and you don't want to let go of it, because you think that it's going to be useful.

It's like hoarding. You hoard a broken bowl, because you think it's going to be useful at some stage. Attachment is really like hoarding material things, and that applies on the psychological level, also. You just don't want to let go of a situation. Sometimes, you realise that the situation is not healthy, but still, you do not want to let go. You hang onto it, thinking that some kind of magic might happen, that something is going to dramatically change that whole situation.

But you desire something that you don't possess. You don't desire something that you already possess. You might have attachment towards it, but you do not have desire. Desire is wanting to possess the Chinese antique in someone's shop window. You want to possess all kinds of things that you do not have, materially, psychologically or spiritually. You aspire to be, you desire to be something or other. That seems to be the whole point. It could be really positive at the beginning, but it could turn into something totally devastating if it is not managed properly. If it is a spiritual desire, it is a necessary component at the beginning. How do you look for spirituality, if you don't desire to change yourself?.

Q: At what point does need become desire?
A: When we begin to become too comfortable, then our desire becomes even more predominant.

Q: It's a very difficult line to draw, isn't it? Do you have a car or do you have a bicycle? Is a bicycle too comfortable compared to public transport?
A: I think you draw the line at how frequently you want to change what you already possess. How soon do you want to get rid of your bicycle? Do you get frustrated by the fact that you can only possess a bicycle, as opposed to a car, and get neurotic about it? Then that's desire. You need a bicycle, and probably you need a car too, but if you get frustrated by the fact that you can only possess a bicycle and not a car, then that turns into desire. And also, how frequently do you want to change it? That's really the point. A lot of people ask, "What's a healthy attitude towards sex? Where do you draw the line between promiscuity and faithfulness?" You can't be jumping from one thing to the other without looking, so I think that's where you draw the line. You can't say, "I don't want a bicycle, I want a car", and then just get rid of that and try to get something else. Some kind of mindfulness is necessary, even on that level. You see how your mind is functioning, see where desire really arises and where need comes to an end.

Q: What I consider a need might, to someone else, be a desire.

A: That's okay. I don't think there's any problem there, because from a Buddhist point of view, that is right. You just need what you can afford, but you don't desire what you can't afford. That's where the desire comes in. A Buddhist would not say that because you can afford much more than someone else means that you're aspiring or have desire. If you can afford it, that's okay. But the moment you begin to aspire for something that you can't afford and get neurotic about it, then that becomes desire.

If you can't afford a new couch, but you get neurotic about the fact that you've got a couch you want to dispose of as soon as you can get another one, and you get more and more worked up about it, then that's desire. It doesn't help. Psychologically and spiritually, it's frustrating.

But you need a couch. You need a couch to sit on. You need a couch to entertain other people. There's nothing wrong with that. But the moment you want something better than what you already possess, something better than what you can afford, then it becomes desire.

That's why it is said that desire is totally devastating and is classified as one of the six basic unhealthy mental events. It gets beyond your needs. If you're better off than other people, then you need certain things more. You might have more people to entertain, you might need to do more than others. Those things might be needs, rather than desires. But the moment you want to have a better situation than you already possess, then that would be desire. If you had only one person coming to visit you, then you don't need very much. You only need one chair. But if you've got more people coming around, then you can't sit them on the floor, so you need more chairs, or a couch. It's as simple as that. But the moment you begin to think that you need something better, then it becomes a problem.

Q: How does a Buddhist decide whether a certain mental event is unhealthy or healthy?
A: Whatever is destructive to you is unhealthy. Whatever integrates your life is healthy.

Q: In some ways, aggression could be seen as being healthy. Having an aggressive attitude towards things gives one more strength to conquer them or to achieve some goal or end. One could see that as being positive or healthy.
A: I don't think so. I don't think an aggressive attitude could achieve anything in particular. In the end, you get knocked down by someone who is more aggressive than you. I think it operates on that level. Even on a social level, I think it really operates like that. It's a game that takes place, but you don't achieve anything that way. If you try to push yourself all the time, then it's going to be who is more pushy than you. In the end, you get beaten up. It's like playing football. It's as simple as that.

Q: Couldn't you say that the outcome of aggression makes you realise that there's some need to relax, so you've actually learned something?
A: Oh yes, sure. The same as desire. At some stage, you begin to realise that it's a vicious circle. It's like playing football, as I said. You're achieving something until you get beaten by someone else. That operates on a spiritual level or a social level.

You can go to a certain point and, when that point is reached, then that's it. You get beaten. You can't continue that way forever.

But a lot of people who approach it that way think they're achieving something, so when they get beaten, with the turmoil, the despair and all the rest of it, the realisation of the fact of the futility of the whole thing makes them fall apart. I think it operates like that on a social level, too. A lot of people go that way and then they finally break up, because there's someone who is stronger or more assertive, whatever. And then you end up feeling total despair.

Q: But you can't go around being non aggressive. You get walked on.
A: No, I don't think that's true at all. I think that's a really Western attitude, that if you're not aggressive, then you get trampled on.

If you try to be genuine and honest, you might not receive the same response from people all the time, but gradually, people begin to respond to your attitude. You can't say, "I've been genuine for a week and no one has responded to me. Stuff it, I'm going to break this guy's neck." But if you really try to be genuine and honest and sympathetic, people begin to respond to you that way, too. Then, you see the value.

It's the same as acting aggressively. If you act aggressively, people might not respond to you immediately, either. People might take it. They might try to understand you, for a while. But after a while, they begin to strike back, so you have to strike them and the vicious circle starts.

Q: You might just want to be left so that you can continue with your practice, whatever, and you're not really out to influence other people by being genuine or honest.
A: But being genuine and honest, that's really what you are, so you're not trying to influence anyone. Being genuine is not trying to be anything. You're not particularly trying to change anyone else's perception. You're just being honest and genuine in your own way, and that's what it is.

Path and Fruition

We can discuss the Buddhist notion of path, as well as fruition, in the context of Yogacara philosophy.

In Buddhist philosophy generally, the path is divided into five categories.

The first is known as *the path of accumulation*, which in Tibetan is called *tshogs lam*. *Tshogs* means *accumulation* and *lam* means *path*. In this context, path of accumulation means that, after understanding what Yogacara philosophy talks about, we then begin to develop the healthy mental events and mental attitudes and, at the same time, dispense with the ones that are unconducive towards our practice. The path of accumulation has dual aspects, in some sense, in that accumulation is understood from the point of view of merit as well as knowledge. There is accumulation of merit and knowledge.

Accumulation of merit means modifying our behaviour. For the first time in our lives, we begin to see that playing games, deceiving ourselves, telling lies, whatever may be, is not conducive to ourselves or to anyone else. So, we begin to modify our behaviour.

Accumulation of knowledge is intimately related with that. We are able to modify our behaviour, because we have some intelligence. It is really important to understand this. Unless we have intelligence, which we develop through practice and through understanding Yogacara philosophy, we might think that we are modifying our behaviour, but it turns out to be another kind of deception. So, some kind of intelligence is necessary.

These two things are regarded as the two types of accumulation, so this is known as path of accumulation. This attitude can only come about when we begin to realise how much we are really suffering, due to the fact that we continuously deceive and torture ourselves. We might think that all kinds of external things contribute towards our depression or towards our emotional instability, but when we look into ourselves, we begin to see that we are actually torturing ourselves. So, for the first time, we treat ourselves properly. We begin to really appreciate who we are and what we are. For the first time, we begin to make friends with ourselves. This comes about through the two accumulations.

Accumulation of merit is not regarded as imperative, that "I should be doing this so I could get some merit". There is no concept of anything like that, at all. The concept of merit is regarded as enriching ourselves. It is not so much about what we should be doing or what we should not be doing and then having to suffer conflicts, because we have set up all kinds of Buddhist ethical standards. All the merit and knowledge that we accumulate begins to become conducive towards our becoming wholesome, as they say. We become much more sane and much more satisfied with who we are and what we are, so we stop destroying ourselves.

That's what is known as the path of accumulation. What we accumulate is not moral imperatives as such, but sophisticated intelligence able to deal with different situations.

The second path, which is *the path of application*, carries that further. We begin to apply that whole thing in our day-to-day situations. Path of application is called *sbyor lam* in Tibetan. *Lam* means *path* and *sbyor* means *application*. Sbyor lam means applying what we have learned through the path of accumulation.

What happens on this level is that we begin to develop confidence in ourselves as to how we should implement certain things. We begin to have less uncertainty and also less tendency to regress into our previous lifestyle. That is really the definition of the path of application.

It is said that, on the path of accumulation, we have embarked on the Buddhist path, but there might still be occasional nostalgia. We might think about the good old days and want to rush back as soon as we can, and we might actually manage to do that, but on the level of the path of application that tendency is completely reduced. So, there would be very little chance of that. Even if we have a fantasy about going backwards, it is seen as a fantasy and it remains a fantasy. It does not get actualised any more. That is known as not going back, not regressing. Once we get onto the level of the path of application, regression is only a fantasy. It begins to become an evolutionally process in that, in some ways, we can't help but go forwards. We might have the fantasy of going backwards, but it manifests as a fantasy, rather than an actuality or reality. So, regression is only seen as a possibility on that level.

Next is the *path of seeing*, which is called *mthong lam* in Tibetan. At this stage, we see things clearly. For the first time in our lives, we begin to see things as they are, instead of seeing things as we want to see them.

The path of seeing is intimately related with the ideally absolute. For the first time, we begin to see things as they are, which is totally freed from the notional-conceptual and the relative. This means we are totally freed from all kinds of wishful thinking, to borrow a psychiatric term. We no longer see things as we want to see them, due to the notional-conceptual and the relative, which are intimately related to building up fantasies and fictions of all kinds, rather than seeing things in a naked or immediate way.

The way we see things is distorted through our own emotional as well as conceptual intermediaries, so things are never seen in an immediate situation. Even when we think we are seeing things immediately, they are never immediate. We see things the way we want to see them, rather than seeing them in a straightforward way. It is said that the reason we cannot see things properly is because of the notional-conceptual and the relative, which are related to what is known as dualistic fixation.

Dualistic fixation means seeing things in a dualistic way, all the time. We do that continuously: subject and object, sacred and profane, spiritual and secular, nirvana and samsara and all the rest of it. As long as we operate on that level, we are operating on the level of notional-conceptual and the relative and we are unable to go beyond that to what is the ideally absolute. These opposite tendencies create all types of tensions and anxieties and we are unable to make a proper assessment of what the situation really is. The whole thing is seen as black and white, in a clear cut manner. Either this is this, or this is that. There is no compromise between the two.

The ideally absolute is regarded as a kind of synthesis of opposite tendencies. From a Buddhist point of view, it is said we can see things clearly when we have a non-dualistic attitude, which is called *advaya* in Sanskrit. *Non-dualistic*, from his particular point of view, does not mean numerical identity. It does not mean that subject and object are one thing. It just means that opposites can be reconciled and

synthesised. They become complimentary, rather than antagonistic. As we see things in a dualistic way, antagonism continues and that creates all kinds of tension and stains whereby we are unable to make a proper assessment of reality.

Third is the path of meditation, *sgom lam* in Tibetan. Path of meditation, in this case, does not particularly mean doing formal meditation. It means a kind of state of *ataraxia*, as the Greeks call it: tranquillity or serenity, something of that sort. One is no longer disturbed by the opposite forces that operate. The practitioner no longer has any type of conflict within himself as to what he should be and what he is, or what he wants to do and what he is told to do, or how he wants to relate to others and how people expect him to relate to others. All those sort of opposite tendencies begin to get resolved in the form of non-dualism. The meditator begins to become serene on this level.

In fact, this is how opposites operate. It is exemplified in biology, where they use the term *symbiosis*, which means that two dissimilar organisms function in such a way that they become complimentary. In a similar way, in meditation all the polarities begin to interact and this dialectical process begins to break through. The tension creates another situation where there is a higher level of existence. If we look at the Darwinian theory of human evolution, it says that human beings evolved from apes or something like that, so humanity included apes. When they started peeling bananas or climbing trees, maybe they did it in some other way than the apes who are still apes. That would have created all kinds of tensions on that level, but that kind of dialectical process between those two species gave rise to human beings. This really operates on all kinds of levels.

Wherever two parties are antagonistic towards each other, it gives rise to a third party. This operates on political, social, religious and personal levels, all the time. If two people are not getting along with each other, there is very real possibility that a third person is going to come into the picture, or if two political parties are fighting each other, that might give rise to a third party.

What is being discussed here is that the notional-conceptual and the relative are related with dualistic thinking and dualistic thinking gets resolved into the level of the absolute, but there are different levels of the ideally absolute as well, as we are going to see. On the path of seeing, one begins to have some resolution of these opposite tendencies, but there is a greater level of reconciliation of these opposite tendencies on the path of meditation.

This leads to the path of no more learning, which is called *mi slob pa'i lam*. On this level, one begins to come very close to being enlightened. There is no longer any question of dualism or non-dualism. Even the question of non-dualism or reconciliation of the opposite tendencies that we might experience all the time is resolved. As it is expressed in the text, one has overcome the two veils of emotional instability or *kleshavarana* and intellectual perplexity or *jnanavarana*.

I think that *veil* is actually a very good word, because, normally, we carry these things as masks, so that we could hide behind them. But, we begin to dispense with them.

These two tendencies operate as a dialectical process as well. Normally, we feel that emotional tendencies are one thing and intellectual tendencies are another. We think, "I feel so emotional", or something of that sort, but then we inevitably come up with some intellectual or philosophical justification as to why we are feeling so.

We have to say, "I'm feeling emotional, because someone did this or that to me", or "I feel depressed because of this, that or the other." We can't just feel emotional, without having some kind of intellectual justification.

So, intellectual perplexity, in this particular case, does not necessarily mean having some kind of philosophical perplexity. I'm sure that is included as well, but even in basic human experience, emotion and thought cannot be really separated as much as we think. Being human really means having both thinking, as well as emotional faculties. These things are intimately related, so the two tendencies operate as a dialectical process as well.

On the level of no more learning, one has overcome that completely. Emotional instability and intellectual perplexity are regarded as being the ground upon which all the other dualistic fixations operate and, once one has overcome those two, then all the other dualistic propensities begin to dissolve by themselves. They no longer become a problem. One has gone to the root of the matter, so to speak, once one has overcome those two tendencies.

So, the path of no more learning means that once one has overcome those tendencies, then there is nothing to learn. One inevitably becomes a Buddha, from this point of view. It is said that Buddha-nature begins to manifest as Buddha's wisdom on the subjective side and the ideally absolute begins to manifest on the objective side. These two get united on the level of the Buddha and cannot be separated. They get united on the ultimate level.

So, that brings us to the end of this series of talks.

All the eight levels of consciousness and the mental events that we have been talking about are intimately related with the two veils of emotional instability and emotional perplexity. The dialectical process that takes place between all kinds of opposite tendencies gets resolved, once one begins to embark on the path and do meditation. One begins to come in contact with reality as it is, instead of seeing it as this, that or the other, which might be our own way of seeing it, rather than seeing reality in the ultimate sense. What is being said here is that we cannot make distinctions, in the ultimate sense. Once we begin to attain enlightenment, subject and object cannot really be said to be either one or two. We cannot say they are non-dual, in the ultimate sense, because even to say non-dual is making another statement. But, at the same time, they are intimately related. The ideally absolute is intimately related with the Buddha's own intelligence of being able to understand the real nature of phenomena.

So, that seems to be it.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask.

Q: Do the paths correspond with the ten *bhumis*?

A: Yes, they do. The path of accumulation and path of application come before the bhumis. The path of seeing is where the bhumis start, the path of meditation starts from the eighth bhumi of the bodhisattvas and the path of no more learning starts at the tenth and the eleventh level, which is Buddhahood.

Q: I fail to see why the last path includes conflict, instabilities and intellectual perplexities.

A: No, it's not that one suffers from that, it's that you can't even talk about the non-duality of things any more. Even non duality becomes a statement of duality of some sort. Non-dual might mean the opposite of duality. That produces another level of duality.

The experience that you might have on that level is free from non-duality, whereas on the level of the path of meditation you might have the experience of non-duality. You begin to see that opposite tendencies can be reconciled or resolved and you begin to experience well-being and serenity, but on the level of no more learning even that becomes questionable. You can't snuggle into non-duality and feel secure and comfortable. That in itself could become another opposite tendency. It might create a possibility for something else to exist. Which is duality, you see. Not so much create something else to exist, as much as create the possibility of seeing non-duality as being something separate from duality.

Q: When you start to see non-duality, is that the Hindu term of feeling that the whole world is one?
A: No. There's a difference. I'm glad you brought that up. Buddhists say *advaya*, which means non-dual, whereas Hindus say *advaita*, which means one. Hindus would say that your atma and the brahman, which is reality, or the ideally absolute for that matter, are one. Buddhists are saying advaya, non-dual. Non-dual does not mean that they are one. Non-dual just means that you don't look at it in a dualistic way. It does not commit you to any kind of metaphysical stance. It is not saying that, metaphysically, everything is one. What it is saying is that we should not look at things in a dualistic way. It does not mean that everything is one, that everything comes out of one or goes back into one. All it is saying is that most of the tension and anxiety that we experience is due to seeing things in a dualistic way.

Christian mystics talk about similar things, seeing Godhead as being the ground and God as being something personal. Godhead is something that you partake in. You, your soul, are part of the Godhead.

Some people tend to say that all religions are one, which is a funny thing to say. If all religions are the same, then why bother, why try to practise anything? At the same time, it does not mean that all religions are valueless. All religions are necessary, but it's good to see the similarities as well as the differences between religions. What the ultimate attainment is, you can never say, but I think diversity is necessary. Diversity is an expression of progress. The more diversity you have, the more progress there is. When things begin to grow, it begins to proliferate.

Q: Which path was the one that you couldn't fall back from?
A: On the path of application, that whole risk is reduced. Wanting to fall back might be a fantasy, but it would not get actualised. It would remain a fantasy. Only in exceptional cases might you go back into your old ways, but your practice is secure and your vision is much more precise and straightforward and you see things much more clearly. Sometimes, you might have flashes of nostalgia or you might get subjected to pressures from others to get back into your old habits, but those things become only temporary temptations or fantasies, rather than actual fact.

Q: Is that due to the patterns that are lodged in your storehouse consciousness?
A: No. On that level, it would be a healthy attitude you have developed from the path of accumulation that makes you go forward, rather than backwards. You have developed healthy attitudes and healthy mental events to such a degree that wanting to become neurotic again becomes only a possibility, a remote possibility for that matter.

Q: Are intellectual perplexity and emotional instability related, or are they separate things?
A: They are intimately related. Sometimes, if people start singing frantically they say, "I sing songs to God, I dedicate my songs to God", but if you ask why they are doing that they would come up with some philosophical justification. They really do it first, but they would have some philosophical or intellectual justification: "God has revealed himself to me, so it is my duty to sing for him." So, those two things are interrelated.

A lot of the time, we tend to separate those two faculties. We tend to think emotion is one thing and thought or the conceptual faculty is another, but that is not so. As long as you are a human being that can never be so. We do not know about chimpanzees and gorillas, but as far as human beings are concerned, thoughts and emotions are intimately related. Sometimes, academics and professors get carried away by their intellectual capacity and think they can become ascetic and austere with their intellectual power and dispense with their emotions, but still, that is not so, because if you contradict what they say, they are going to jump up and down. They want to break your skull. They might stand behind the lectern and start lecturing and they are cool and austere, but if you start pressing them too much, they are going to get redder and redder in the face. So, those two things are intimately related and that is what Buddhists mean by overcoming those two tendencies.

Q: So in creating further situations, there is a play of those two things.
A: So they get a result. That's what Buddhists mean.

Normally, we become extreme. Either we are too intellectual or too emotional, too obsessed with spiritual things or too obsessed with material things, too obsessed with good or too obsessed with evil. The propensity is to go one way or the other, but when we go to one extreme, then the other becomes even more predominant. What we are trying to avoid becomes even more predominant and becomes even more of a threat to us, so the dialectical process continues.

What is being suggested here is that we have to come to some kind of reconciliation between those opposite tendencies, which is achieved through understanding the ideally absolute. It is said that all opposite tendencies come about through the two veils of emotional instability and intellectual perplexity. They are the ground which creates the possibilities for all the opposite tendencies that we might develop in terms of viewing things.

Q: So after we understand the philosophy, we begin to develop healthy mental attitudes and dispense with unhealthy attitudes. That keeps the whole thing moving

onto the next level. You don't just go into the first level and stay there. There seems to be something that changes.
A: That's the whole point. That's where Buddhist meditation comes in, where we begin to see that emotional instability and intellectual perplexity are connected with the mental events and eight levels of consciousness.

In meditation, we begin to see how that whole thing operates. We begin to become mindful and see how we view things from a dualistic point of view and we begin to see how acting through dualistic perception would leave certain traces and dispositions, which make us become even more stable in relating to things. Being able to perceive things becomes difficult.

That is regarded as the dimming of perception, the dimming of intelligence. Being able to make a proper assessment becomes less and less of a possibility, so you become more and more alienated from yourself, as well as from the world, from reality. You conjure up all these images about yourself and you conjure up fantasies about the world, a paranoid version of the world, so you haven't any direct contact with that either. You end up being dangled in mid-air between you and the world, in some sense.

That's why it's called *ma rig pa*. Ma rig pa does not mean that you are not intelligent in the ordinary sense. You could be so intelligent that you come up with all sorts of tricks to avoid feeling who you are or coming in direct contact with yourself. You do not want to do that, so you come up with all these justifications as to why you are so, why you want to create this new image, whatever. The thing is, when you want to look for who you are, you do not look inside, you look for other things. You look at others and then you try to find out who you are. You use other people as the criterion to find yourself, which is impossible. But that's what people do. They try to find out who they are by looking at others.

Q: Is an awareness of what you're doing a prerequisite for embarking on the path?
A: If you want to make a journey overseas, first you have to equip yourself with the necessary things. You have to have enough money and make preparations. Once you have done that, you get to the next step, which is taking the real journey. Once you are on the vehicle, it's hard to come back. Once you are on the airplane, whether you like it or not, you are going.

It's like that with the path of application. There is the possibility that the pilot might receive some message of an emergency and decide to turn back, but that's only a remote possibility. Ninety-nine percent of the time, you are there in the airplane and you are going to get to wherever you are going. In a similar kind of way, once you get to the level of application, you are already on the path and regression is a remote possibility.

Q: It seems that there would be many people who, without being aware of it, are accumulating merit. Is it important to be conscious that you are following a path, to have an awareness that that's what is happening?
A: To a certain degree, that is important.

I think that a lot of well meaning people who do good things for people sometimes turn into fanatics. From a Buddhist point of view, any fanaticism is regarded as totally undharmic. It's not regarded as a Buddhist way of life. You

cannot be fanatical in the name of the Buddha-dharma. If you embark on a particular path and you do certain practices, then you are constantly reminded of the fact that you can't turn into a fanatic, you can't become too dogmatic about the whole thing.

In Buddhism, the dissolution of opposite tendencies becomes important. Getting obsessed with religious or spiritual questions would be regarded as an obsession. It would be an impediment, rather than anything else. Otherwise, people might think, "That's good. I'm going to change the world with my spiritually".

Q: It requires a conscious effort to develop mental events. Is there is a danger if you develop healthy mental events, because you think that's going to keep you on the path?
A: I think that's true. Sometimes Buddhists try to develop all these mental events and they end up kicking themselves into the ground. They think they should be developing healthy mental events and, when they realise how many other things are going on, they begin to hate themselves. The mental events are supposed to cool you down, not make you neurotic about the whole thing. When you feel like kicking yourself, because you have not been able to develop healthy mental events enough, then you should think, "Well, this is not right. I haven't really adopted a healthy attitude at all."

Q: How should one view an unhealthy mental event? How does one deal with it?
A: Sometimes Buddhists think, "I feel so aggressive, I should keep the aggression out." But the moment you begin to do that, you have already adopted an aggressive standpoint. You are so hyped up and pissed off with your aggression that you can't stand it any more, which is another form of aggression.

The basic thing is for you to just see it as being aggression. There is nothing wrong with it. It's part of the human situation. On top of that, you begin to acknowledge the fact that you are feeling aggressive and, instead of expressing blindly, you feel the aggression properly. You see how you feel when you feel aggressive. Then, gradually, try to accommodate that. Aggression can be accommodated. Once you begin to accommodate your aggression properly, the need to act aggressively would lessen.

Q: What positive mental event does aggression become?
A: Aggression wouldn't particularly get transformed into anything, on this level. On the Buddhist tantric level, it's a different matter. But on the Yogacara level, it won't necessarily get transformed into anything.

You could develop the mental attitude of love and compassion towards your own aggression. In fact, you are really beginning to make friends with yourself. You are beginning to appreciate yourself, in some sense, if you could make friends with your aggression. That does not mean you have to propagate aggression - that's not making friends with your aggression. Without any kind of ulterior motive, if you could make friends with your aggression, then that is what should be happening.

You use the healthy mental events not to counterattack, but to, in some ways, diffuse the other unhealthy mental events. That's what the whole thing is all about -

not to destroy them. Some people think "I should be destroying my anger, I should be destroying my desire" and they end up getting even more neurotic about the whole thing, because it doesn't happen.

That whole attitude is negative, anyway. Wanting to destroy your anger is a negative attitude to begin with.

You accommodate those things as part of you and relate to them as they are, which might not be easy. It is not regarded as an easy step to take, but still, that would have a much more valuable effect in the long run, because you could ignore your anger or you could suppress your anger, but the anger is going to manifest in some other form. It is not just going to disappear. So, the best thing to do is try to make friends with your anger. Then, you are making friends with yourself at the same time.

Sometimes we feel angry towards others, we are destructive towards others, but we haven't looked at how we are destroying ourselves, how we are angry at ourselves, how we hate ourselves. Sometimes people are so nice to others. They don't show any anger, but inside they are destroying themselves. People think they are so good, they're fantastic, but inside they are just tearing themselves apart, right, left and centre. You could exhibit all these religious tendencies, but still, you haven't really dealt with your anger properly and you haven't really accepted yourself properly. You might be so obsessed with the notion of pleasing others that you are never satisfied with how much you are doing. "I'm not doing enough, I'm not benefiting others enough, I'm not pleasing them enough." It is only when we begin to accept our own anger that we would be able to be really satisfied with ourselves. Then, we would be able to benefit others much better too, because we don't suffer from any conflicts within ourselves.

Q: If you deal with anger in that way, does it mean that your anger is going to run out, or is the anger there, but you're able to put it to positive use?
A: It would be good to get into how Buddhist tantra would view these negative energies. But normally, what we should be doing is, first, don't regard the anger as being bad. That's another way of looking at anger from a habitual point of view. We should regard the anger as being some kind of energy. It is not necessarily bad or good. Anger becomes bad when it's exhibited in all kinds of ways towards others or when we use it to destroy ourselves. Anger itself is not good or bad. It's a kind of emotional energy that we possess, as much as desire and jealousy. They are also a form of energy. And that's the whole point.

Once we begin to have a healthy attitude towards anger, then we begin to see the possibility of how to use that energy in a much more satisfying way. We begin to see that point of view. But we could see that point of view only after we have looked at it from the Mahayana point of view.

The transmutation of aggressive energy into something much more positive, which is not positive, which is not the opposite of negative particularly, but is something much more encompassing than that, would only come about on the tantric level. But some kind of ground has to be laid, whereby we could first accept anger. If we can't accept anger as being part of ourselves and have some kind of friendly attitude towards it, then transmutation would become really difficult too. We might want to transmute anger because we hate it so much, which does not

help. We set up another vicious circle and that is precisely what samsara is all about - going round and round and not getting anywhere.

So, the starting point is to just regard anger as some kind of energy that manifests in all kinds of ways. We accept it as being part of ourselves and just see that, because the more we disassociate ourselves from our neuroses or emotional instabilities, the more they become a problem. That's really true. When we can accommodate our own neuroses and emotional instabilities, then we can accommodate parts of ourselves, without having to reject them. Rejecting anger would be rejecting part of ourselves.

A lot of people think, "If you make friends with your anger, then you are going to be so aggressive." But we are aggressive already, so the thing is to find out whether it works or not. It's worth trying. Either we are developing ourselves or we are being aggressive towards others anyway, so it doesn't make much difference. It's worth experimenting to see whether that works or not.

Q: Is ego the source of all anger?
A: Yes, I think that's true. I think it all comes from not being able to see ourselves properly. We might talk about ego, but we really haven't any notion about what ego is and we don't even know what we want to be. Sometimes we have this idealised notion of ourselves, this gigantic version of ego, and sometimes we feel so insecure and insignificant and there's some pathetic version of ego, but there's no real solid thing that we can hang onto as being what we are. The reason we are unable to see ourselves properly is because we don't look inside to find out. The notion of ego that we have is built up using other people as our criterion.

Q: Do you mean that in the sense of looking at others to tell us who we are, or looking to others to see what they're about and believing we should be like what we imagine they are?
A: Both self-hate and our idealised version of ourselves come about due to regarding other people as being the criterion. We want to be like someone else and, at the same time, we hate ourself because we are not like someone else. That's why it is said that samsara is never ending, because, unless we are totally neurotic or psychotic, we sometimes achieve our idealised version of self.

If you want to be a really good painter and get obsessed with that notion, if you use someone else as being the criterion, you might become a good painter and become famous. But then, you want to idealise yourself again. You want to look for something else, use someone else as the criterion.

It's a never ending process, because you haven't really accepted yourself. That's why a lot of famous painters and musicians fall apart, I think, because whatever they are trying to achieve turns out to be fantasy, in some sense, and they still haven't come any closer to themselves.

There are others who haven't achieved very much at all on the external side, but they are really happy with themselves. They are fantastic, in some sense. They're not aspiring to be something that they cannot be. I'm not saying that we shouldn't aspire to be anything, but a lot of the time our idealised version of ourselves could get too out of hand, whereby it can only be achieved in fantasy or dream, not in reality. That's what the whole thing is.



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